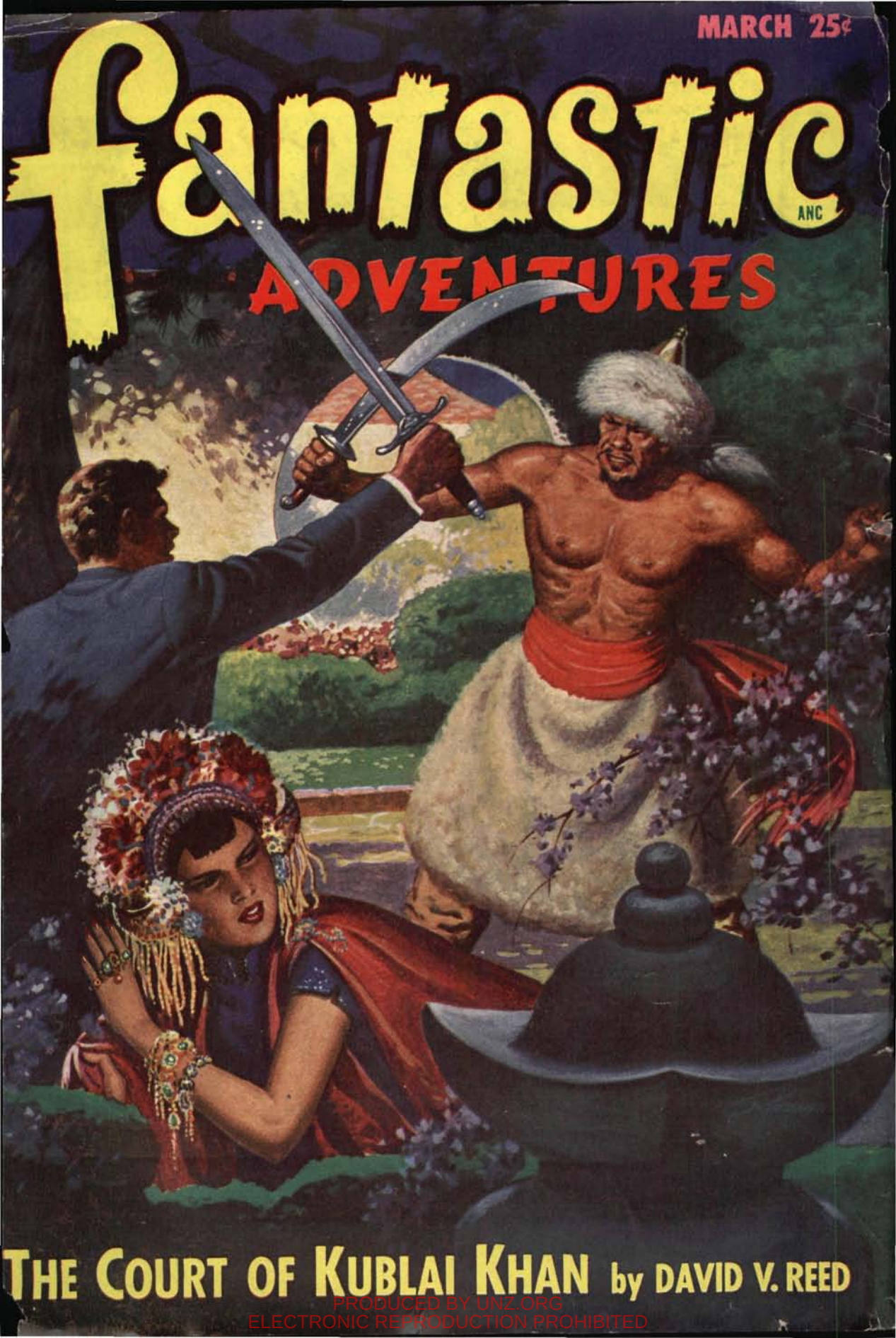

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "The Court of Kublai Khan."

Published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. New York Office, Empire State Building, New York 1, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter, July 9th, 1947, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. In U. S., Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions, $2.50 for twelve issues; in British Empire, $3.50; all other foreign countries, $4.50 for twelve issues. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.

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VOLUME 10 NUMBER 3

All Stories Complete

THE COURT OF KUBLAI KHAN (Novelette—18,000)..... by David V. Reed..... 8

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Eric Boland fell asleep while reading the poem, Kublai Khan—and woke up in a strange land.

MAKE YOURSELF A WISH (Short—2,800)..... by Geoff St. Reynard..... 48

Illustrated by Henry Sharp

The demon granted Frank White a single wish. But wishes, like demons, are not to be trusted.

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Kirby's typewriter was no ordinary typewriter—it seemed to have a strange power . . .

ASTRAL RHYTHM (Short—5,000)..... by Bernie Kamins..... 66

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Illustrated by Malcolm Smith

If we assume that our world was created by an alien race—then who created the aliens? . . .

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WE'RE starting things off this issue with a real treat, the return of one of your great favorites in the past—David V. Reed. And the story, "The Court of Kublai Khan." It shouldn't be necessary to go any further in telling you about the story—so we won't. All we'll say is that you've got some mighty smooth reading in store for you, as the author's by-line will guarantee. And along those lines all we've got to say about Reed is that the guy just doesn't write enough! We understand he has quite a number of stories started, but for some reason he just doesn't get around to finishing them. How about that, Dave? Are you going to let the readers of FA down like that? Finish those stories!

WE'LL pause here for a ten-minute break while you sit back and admire the current Bob Jones cover. . . . It's a beauty—right?

GEOFF ST. REYNARD is back again this month with an unusual short fantasy entitled, "Make Yourself a Wish." This is a swell little number about a man who made a pact with a demon, and when he made that pact he thought he had covered any possible loophole. But, of course, a demon is a pretty cagey fellow himself. We think you'll get a big kick out of this yarn. . . .

"Fantastic—aren't they!"

"SPIRIT OF THE KEYS" is the latest story to come from the pen of top-notcher Chester S. Geier. Little can be said about Geier's work—it speaks for itself. So all we'll say here is that you can expect a terrific human interest story with a swell fantasy pitch.

THIS month we're presenting a new outhor in the pages of FA. We're speaking of Bernie Kamins and his short story, "Astral Rhythm." Bernie is quite a busy man, we understand, being the Publicity Director for Jesse Lasky Productions at RKO out Hollywood way. But with all his work he found time to sit down and write a neat little fantasy yarn. We'd also like to mention that Bernie has done quite a bit of writing for the movies, so he really knows his business. We'd like to know how you liked his first effort for FA.

DICK SHAVER is back this month, too. We can hear you cheering! This month Dick presents a short fantasy story entitled, "The Thin Woman." It's all about a man who lived two lives—one while awake and the other while asleep. In his dream-world every night he met a fascinating woman, so fascinating, in fact, that his *conscious* world began to be affected. You take up the story from there and find out what happened.

THE final story for the issue, but by no means last, is the new short novel by Lee Francis, "Zero A.D." Lee has risen to the top ranks of your favorite writers during the past year, with some mighty fine stories. We think that this new yarn will firmly establish his already fine reputation as a top FA writer. As to the story, well, anything we say here will only tend to give away the plot—and brother, the plot is a honey! So just sit back and prepare yourself for a fine two hours' reading. . . .

AS A sort of sneak-preview we'd like to mention a couple of top novel-length stories that are coming up shortly. One is by an old-time favorite, G. H. Irwin, entitled, "Lair of the Grimalkin." Irwin is the author of the now famous "Vengeance of Martin Brand," which appeared in *Amazing Stories*. The other story is by a newcomer, Lawrence Chandler, entitled "Forgotten Worlds." Which winds up shop for this month. See you.....WLH

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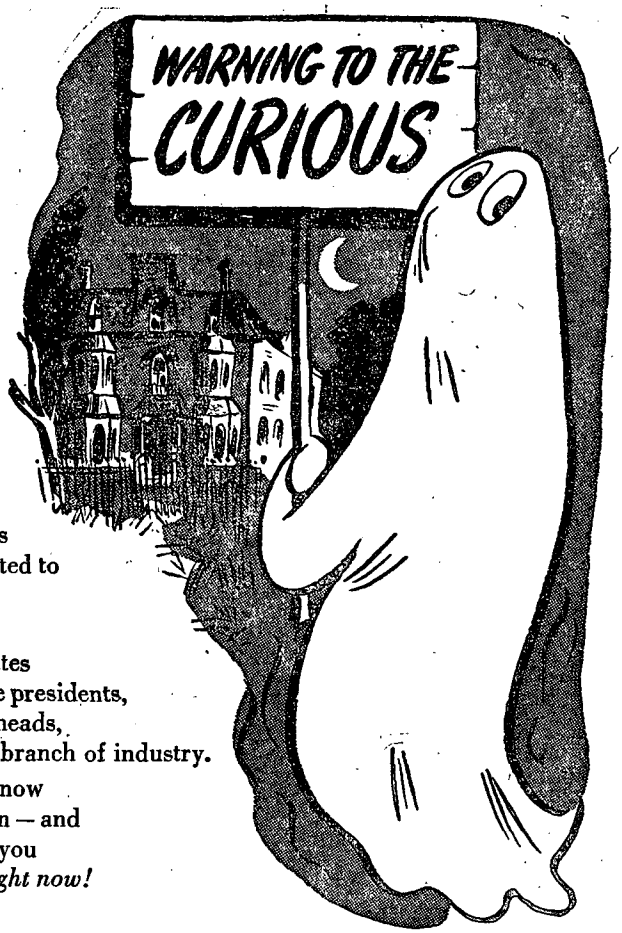

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The COURT of KUBLAI KHAN

by DAVID V. REED

I was surrounded by a group of fierce-looking men, and there seemed to be no way of escape

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Eric Boland read the poem, *Kublai Khan*, and suddenly found himself amidst a land of magic

MAYBE you'll understand this a little better if somewhere in your life something apart from all natural experience has happened to you, something apart from reality, the way we usually speak of reality. I don't know how to make this more clear. You either feel it right

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away or you don't, and I'm not the first one who's said this—this story is second hand.

The first I heard of it was when Professor Marshall—he's the famous Marshall who advises Hollywood on Shakespeare—wrote me a short letter. He said my closest friend, Eric Boland, was thinking of resigning from the faculty of the college, and he added that Eric might be kicked off before he got around to it. So I took the next train to Ithaca.

All the way up from New York I kept thinking about Marshall's mysterious hinting at irregularities in the way Eric had been conducting himself, in classes and outside. What Marshall meant was class: Eric had one class there. It was listed in the University catalogue as Romantic Poetry, and how anyone could get into trouble teaching something like that was beyond me.

Certainly, I thought about the town girls. I had known some of them myself. But I knew Eric had had no time for that. He was one of those brilliant students who wind up after graduation on a thousand bucks a year; they call them teaching fellows. If the name Eric Boland still sounds familiar to you, and it should because it was only three years ago that you used to read about him, you remember Cornell's blond giant, the Boland who played right end and made half a dozen of the All-American teams. He had passed up professional ball and bond selling and donned, as he cheerfully put it, the hairy shirt of a scholar. It meant one class that met an hour a day, three days a week, but Eric usually put in sixty other hours a week in the library, doing the dirty work in research for the senior members of his department. The rest of the time he could spend trying to borrow money.

Professor Marshall was at the Student Union when I found him, playing ping-pong for a nickel a game. He hadn't changed at all in the years since I had been graduated; the same round, smiling face, tanned every Spring from fishing in an open boat, the glasses dangling on a ribbon, the heavy gold watch chain with an enormous Phi Beta Kappa key laid out over his capacious vest. He gave me a firm handshake, put a nickel down on the table, and put on his coat. We started walking downhill along College Avenue toward the Dutch Kitchen.

"Well, I'm glad you came," he said. "Someone had to talk to him before it was too late, and he wouldn't listen to me. I shouldn't wonder if the town newspapers caught hold of it and went crazy."

"I wish they had," I said. "Maybe I'd know what's up."

"Oh. You haven't seen him?"

"Mrs. Johnson said he wouldn't be back from the library until four. I thought I'd see you and find out what this is all about."

Marshall stopped walking, and he hesitated a moment before he said, "I'm sorry, Peter. I don't think I ought to be the one to tell you. This whole affair is so . . ." the old, quizzical smile lingered a moment, ". . . so strange. Really it is. Let's go see him, shall we? He should be back by now."

We went back up the hill and turned in at Linden Street. There were girls riding down on English bicycles, and their laughter drifted back to us, and after they were gone—as if it had waited for them to go—the clock in the library tower struck four, and the sound of the chimes floated down into the valleys that fell away from the campus. I felt the sweet, thrusting pain of nostalgia then, walking down this same street, seeing the houses I had known, seeing the same old elm moving in the

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wind. It seemed suddenly that I had but to breathe deeply and the years that had gone were recaptured.

Mrs. Johnson was sweeping the porch when we got there. Eric—she called him Professor Boland—had returned, she said, and he was upstairs, and she had given him my note. We went up and saw that his door was open, but when we knocked there was no answer, and when we went in he wasn't there. I went downstairs and asked Mrs. Johnson again.

"He's upstairs," she said. "I passed by his open door less than five minutes ago, and I've been sweeping the halls and the porch since then. He didn't go out."

SHE came back up with me to the empty apartment, then, deciding he had probably gone into someone else's room, she tried them all. But he wasn't to be found. I could see the bewilderment growing on her face as she returned to Eric's place, walking through the sitting room, study, and bedroom, even opening one of the closets, as if Eric was hiding.

"It isn't so," she said. "I know he was here."

I laughed and said Eric had undoubtedly sneaked past her and we'd wait. But she shook her head and tried the other closets. There was something in the way she went about this that made me feel peculiar, and when I looked at Marshall I wondered if I had the same expression on my face. When Mrs. Johnson went out, Marshall held out a book he had taken from one of the shelves in the study. There was a long, sealed manila envelope in it.

Across the face of the envelope, Eric's careless scrawl had written my name and address together with this notation: *To be forwarded in the event of my disappearance.*

I put it down on the table. "He's trying to kid us," I said.

Mrs. Johnson was at the door again. "My little boy's been playing outside for half an hour," she said. "He saw Professor Boland come in, but he didn't see him go out." She kept looking from me to Marshall as if we were keeping something from her.

"Thank you," I said, and I closed the door.

We sat in the living room for more than an hour after that, smoking and talking haphazardly about the college and the reservoir conduit I was working on near Peekskill, and sometimes there were long intervals between answers. Once I looked out of a window and Mrs. Johnson was on the porch stairs, looking down the street. Twilight was beginning to settle and the smell of Spring was strong and fresh, and when I turned back to where Marshall was sitting, with the envelope near him, it had become unreal. I turned on a light, then I picked up the envelope and opened it. It was filled with a score of thin sheets, completely written over. I sat down opposite Marshall and passed him each sheet as I finished.

The letter is most of this story:

LET me begin at the beginning, and possibly, in a sense, a bit before that, because there seem to have been antecedent facts connected with what has happened to me. Unless you know them, I am afraid this will be even less intelligible than the facts themselves warrant.

I've been working like a demon these past few months. Dr. Hoag plans to publish the second volume of his trilogy on the Lake poets this fall, and this one is the Coleridge volume. As usual, I've done most of the work, but I haven't given a damn because it had long ago become a labor of love for me.

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Sometimes I'd be up all night reading every lousy syllable ever written about Coleridge, and go to class next day to lecture on him.

And little by little, the man got me. Does this sound as incomprehensible as I have sometimes thought it might? I still think of you as the hard-headed engineer, you see. At any rate, you must try to understand. I don't know how to express the strange sympathy and kinship I felt for a man dead more than a century, but it was there. This queer, contradictory Coleridge and the sadness and misery that pursued him through his lifetime captured my imagination completely. Probably that was the most important factor in what happened.

You know the sort of thing he wrote, things like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* mystical and wildly imaginative. The scholars have it that he was an opium addict, having taken to it after one of his projects failed, and much of his work was supposedly written while he was under the influence of opium. Of all his works, none seems to fit the diagnosis better than his poem *Kublai Khan,* which has always been my favorite.

Every time I read it, and that was often enough, I'd begin to understand why his biographers constantly refer to him as "poor Coleridge." It has less meaning than it has magnificent imagery, and wild and mournful language. Coleridge himself spoke of it as "a vision in a dream."

In Xanadu did Kublai Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

That's the way it begins. It goes on for some sixty lines, mentioning various places, "a damsel with a dulcimer," and ends abruptly. Coleridge accompanied this poem with a note, saying he had fallen asleep and dreamt it, after taking an anodyne because of illness. He wrote:

"The Author continued in a profound slumber, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence that he composed no less than three hundred lines, if that indeed can be called composition in which the images rose up as *things.*"

When he awoke, he eagerly began putting those lines on paper, but he was interrupted. He tried to return to it again, but the rest of the poem had gone from his memory; it was completely forgotten. Had he been able to finish it, it might have been one of the greatest poems in our literature. Coleridge would say of it, and of his plan of finishing it, "I shall sing sweeter tomorrow." It never came.

THREE weeks ago, late on a Friday afternoon, I was working in the stacks in the library cellar. I hadn't had much sleep the night before. The stacks were cool and gloomy and quiet, and my books lay on a desk under a tiny reading lamp. I remember feeling tired and leaning back in my chair, and idly fingering through a little red volume with the *Kublai Khan* poem in it. Possibly I closed my eyes and began reading it from memory . . .

For all the odd clothes he wore, obviously this was Coleridge who walked beside me. I had seen his picture so often before; the black, melancholy eyes, the long, well-shaped nose and the rather full lips—a handsome but rather delicately fashioned man. We were walking along a paved pathway that was elevated a foot above the grassy lawns on either side, and we were talking about something. The transition

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had been immediate and without sensation. I have no recollection of the conversation, nor did I seem to know what it was about in that first moment of consciousness, but it seemed evident we had been talking for some time.

A moment later there was a tremendous shouting. A score of men were running toward us. They were no more than five feet tall, a group of incredibly fierce and bewildered men, wearing short gowns and shining breastplates and helmets like huge soup tureens, their legs bound in cloth puttees. They waddled on their thick-soled shoes, long hair streaming behind them, clanking spears three times their size against their armor, and yelling in some nonsensical jargon which I understood perfectly.

The confusion was terrific. First they grabbed Coleridge and hustled him off the path a few yards away. Then several of them gingerly took hold of me —I suppose my tweed suit dismayed them a bit—and pulled me in an opposite direction. Then the two groups rushed back to each other and began shouting across the raised pathway.

The trouble was that they were speaking two different languages, and the groups had gotten mixed. One of them yelled, "You, Pai-Lo, will pay for this dereliction with your head!" But Pai-Lo, whichever one he was, cried out, "I swear they were together but an instant!" A third, evidently unable to understand Pai-Lo, kept demanding an explanation in a language which Pai-Lo didn't speak.

But since I knew I could speak both languages, I almost decided to settle matters, but I really didn't give a damn. The whole thing was thoroughly enjoyable. Not only were there elaborate costumes and striking scenery, for I had distinctly made out distant pink structures like oriental castles, but Coleridge was waiting to carry on a conversation.

I edged around the quarreling dark little men and started toward him. Then, suddenly, I knew who Pai-Lo was, because he had jumped up on the pathway, brandishing his spear and invoking several local dieties to witness his innocence. He would not, he screamed, lose his only head because of a Saracen's apparition. He leaped off the pathway and came charging straight for me, his spear in front of him. By the Saracen's apparition, apparently, he meant me.

So I ran. The spear, gleaming in the sunlight, followed, with Pai-Lo fifteen feet behind the spear and the rest of the gang after him.

There was a huge tree about a hundred yards away. It looked like a good place to be in. I got to the tree rather quickly, grabbed the lowest branch and tried to swing up. The branch groaned, emitted a loud report and came off in my hands. It cost me the five seconds I had put between myself and that screaming horde, and I just about managed to duck around the tree trunk when the spear came sailing by. Pai-Lo followed in the course of time, and I whacked him across the chest with the stout end of the branch. A bell clanged and Pai-Lo sat down abruptly.

Then his friends started arriving. From what I could gather quickly from the two languages, I was inclined to think they were madder at him than at me, but since I wasn't sure, I rang up a few more fares. After a few minutes, it stopped being funny.

But that's the hell of dreams. They begin where they like and end the same way. Either one is sitting up in bed, or there is another scene, particularly if the last one has been unpleasant. And you can't exactly say that getting cracked over the head with a heavy spear is pleasant. It ended that way.

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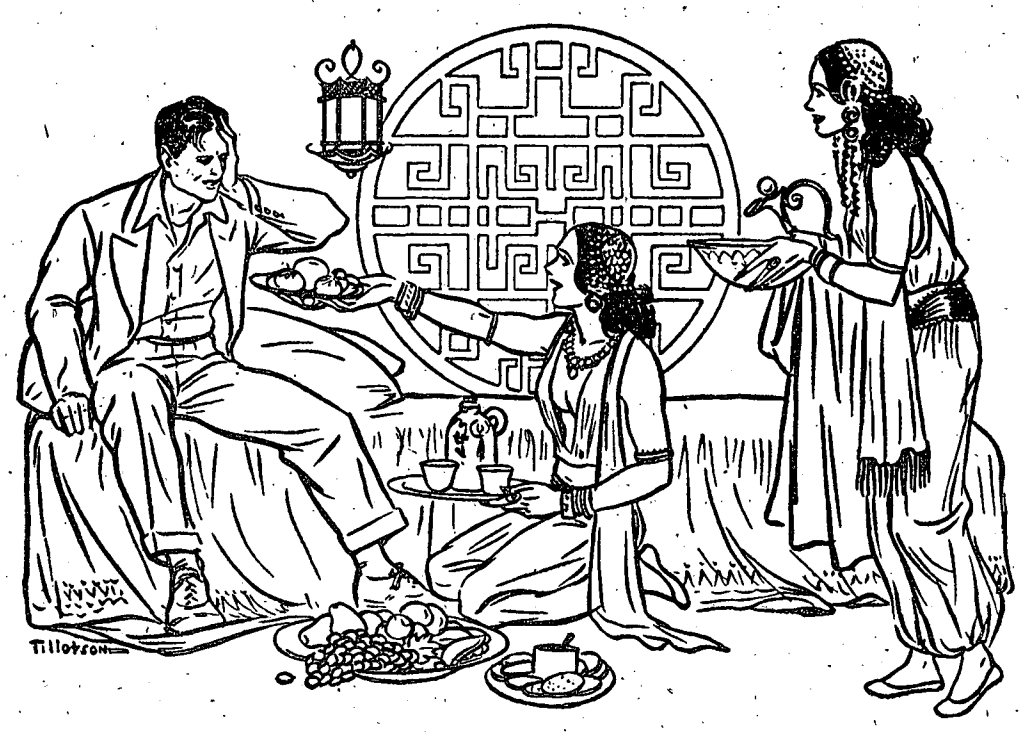

CHAPTER II

SO NOW, sitting up, there was a pillow under my head. I was lying on a couch that was covered with a metallic black-red cloth. A pale green marble floor stretched away toward walls covered with tapestries, and one end of the room was open, leading to a balcony. There were arches before the balcony, and through them streamed warm shafts of sunlight. I could hear voices outside, growing and then diminishing in volume, as if people were passing by the balcony.

Before I could get up to explore the possibilities of the place, two of them entered through a door, and they were lovely. One of the girls wore a short lavender tunic, the other wore a flowered red one, tightly bound around an excellent figure in a way that displayed her character as charming, simple, and without secrets. Both were dark-haired and rather dark-complexioned, a sort of rose and olive that looked incredibly healthy and attractive.

They approached me demurely, bowed, and put down a small silver tray. The tray held a large goblet with an amber fluid in it, and beside it was a fruit the size of an apple, dull red and smooth as a peach. The girl in lavender was carrying clothes and sandals and she put them on the floor near the tray.

They retreated a few feet, bowed again, and the one in flowers said, "When the visitor is refreshed and clothed, Vacameth awaits him."

This Vacameth must be quite a girl, if these two were only the hired help.

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What she wanted with me was also a pleasant conjecture. I said, "And you two visions just work here?"

The one in flowers said, "We are of Timochain, the eighth kingdom of the province of Persia, and we were born into servitude."

"Ah, still the Orient?" I said. I remembered Coleridge then, just for a moment. I wondered how he was doing. There were two girls here; maybe he would fit in again. Vacameth could wait. "Well, don't rush me, girls. Sit down where I can look at you."

They sat down on a cushion near one of the walls. I picked up the fruit and ate it. It tasted like a huge strawberry. The amber liquid turned out to be a cool, spiced wine, and as I lay back on the couch and sipped it, I decided I was the least bit partial to the one in lavender. She seemed a trifle shy, which I like in girls, and she had a damn provocative smile. I tried to make the other one disappear, but it didn't work.

When I finished eating, they came back and held up the clothes they had brought, a white robe and a pair of sandals. I took the robe dubiously, wondering what I was supposed to wear underneath. I asked them, and they said that I would wear nothing underneath and they would now help me dress.

The hell with that. I rolled up my trousers until they couldn't be seen under the robe and tied a wide, black leathern belt around my middle. The girls didn't seem to understand. I was getting confused myself. "I'll probably hate myself for this later," I told them. I took off my shoes and put on the sandals lined with white fur. My big feet looked ridiculous. Maybe I should have taken off my socks.

"Okay," I said, and took them by the hand. The girls from Timochain didn't bat an eye. We began to walk right out.

Well, up to that moment when we actually started walking, this room had been the only one that existed for me. The others, in what was obviously an elaborate structure, should have remained vaguely suggestive, like stage scenery. But we walked out through an archway, passing through rooms that kept getting larger all the time, all of them filled with magnificent furniture and hangings and pottery and sculpture and rugs it would have taken hundreds of hides to make, and tapestries large enough for a four-master's mainsail.

THEN we came into a corridor that was jammed with people, all on the move. There were scores of them, of different colors and races, dressed in a bewildering variety of styles, and the whole place humming with their talk, and there wasn't a language there that I didn't understand. There were Turks, Abyssinians, Tartars, Persians, Mongols, Saracens, Arabs, Burmese, talking about horses, wines, lands, travels, women, commerce—every d a r n e d thing and I understood it all. It made me feel the least bit queer somehow.

We turned at a branch in the corridor and stopped before a huge black door studded with copper decorations. One of the girls opened the door and motioned me to enter, but showed no sign of coming along.

"And this is the brush-off?" I said.

They both bowed and backed away, and there was nothing for me to do but play the game. I went through the door and found myself in a room that seemed ceilingless. Before a huge, circular window sat an aged man dressed in a white robe, with an enormous crest of silver thread across his chest. He looked toward me, and for some reason, though I heard nothing, I knew

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that the door through which I had come had closed behind me.

I tried to tell myself, as I approached and saw him more clearly, that I had known what he would be like. His skin shone like ancient gold in the sunlight and his eyes were bright with the luster of age. He would be the classical wise old man, polite, philosophical, full of wonderful talk.

"I am Vacameth the Saracen," he said. "Be welcome to the court of Kublai Khan."

Vacameth? I suppose I couldn't help smiling, after what I had been thinking. But he was the Saracen, and possibly . . . "The Saracen whose apparition I am?" I said.

"Hardly an apparition," he said, with a faint smile, "though you are doubtless referring to me. I am an astrologer in the service of the Great Khan, and I am from this city of Kanbalu, which is in the province of Cathay."

He seemed to be waiting for me to identify myself, but I said, "Then Coleridge is still part of this?" He nodded. "Well, then," I told him, "I am Eric Boland, from the city of Ithaca, where, at the risk of breaking this up, I'm asleep in the library stacks, and enjoying it."

Vacameth's face clouded momentarily, and then he started to rise, and my eyes never left his robe as he slowly stood up, a tall, majestic old man. There was something distinctly . . . terrifying . . . in the clarity with which I heard that faint rustle of silk as his robe stirred. It was a little sound, lying thinly over the complex pattern of other sounds that sifted through the open windows, and suddenly, as if they had lain dormant, waiting to overwhelm me, I remembered everything I had heard and all the things I had seen. So many things, beyond my knowledge or experience, beyond mental synthesis, the sights, colors, tastes, with nothing left out, nothing fading, complete to minute details . . .

A dream, hellish and potent, nevertheless a dream and nothing more. But, irrevelantly enough, in my mouth I felt one of the seeds from the strange fruit I had eaten. No, I thought—it's a seed from the raspberries I had for lunch. I probed for the seed where it had lodged in my teeth and took it out. It was a strange tiny green thing, oval-shaped and glistening. I dug my nail into it and cut it in two. A tiny droplet of moisture oozed from it. When I opened my hand it fell to the floor. I felt that I couldn't take my eyes away from it.

"Tell me," I heard Vacameth's voice, "have you ever known a moment so agonized that it seemed to last an hour, or a week so happy that it sped by like a day? That moment *was* an hour; that week *was* merely a day. And you have known people for whom time stopped. A loved one dies, and perhaps the mourner refuses to go any farther into time. Time has ceased to exist. All their actions, their beliefs, their knowledge is devoted to that belief. They remain in that time when the loved one still lived.

"How else do you measure time? By your hourglass, your sun-dial, your calendar? So man measures space also, but is an infinity a matter of so many thumb-rules or mile posts? Space is something quite apart from our human measurements. So, too, is time. Time is not a matter of moments, hours, days, years, though we may choose to call it so. Time exists in itself for every man. One man has lived a full life in a score of years, another knows that in four times that number he has not yet begun to live. Time is in the mind . . ."

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HIS voice had quieted me and his words had driven the sudden numbing fear from my brain, and all at once I felt reassured. "Then all this does exist only in my mind?" I said.

"It exists in reality," Vacameth said, "because it once existed in time. Nothing exists which does not have duration, if only for an instant. But when duration ends, must existence likewise end?"

"But can your Kanbalu possibly exist simultaneously with the city of my day which I know as Peking?" I asked him.

"You have wandered through open fields which were empty to your perception," said Vacameth. "But what of the air? It was a physical substance, occupying space. You walked through it, gently displacing it, actually unconscious of its existence. There are, among us, savage peoples who have no knowledge of the existence of air. Does it thereby cease to exist? Without it they would perish.

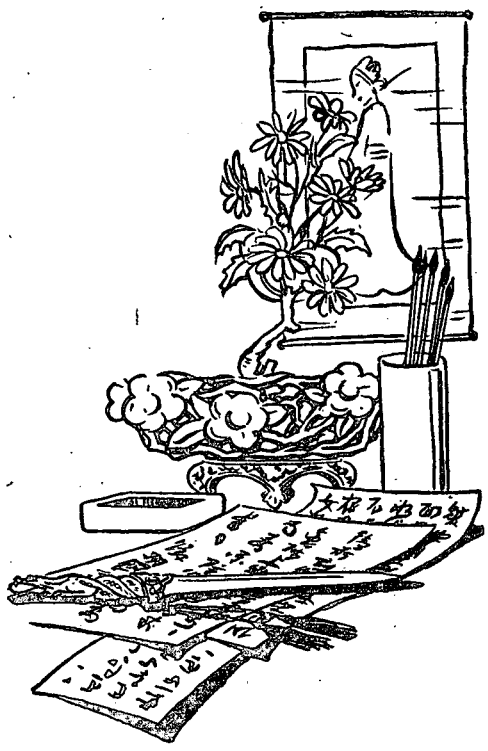
"But for us, where is our food without yesterday's sowing? Where are our houses without yesterday's building? The physical existence of the past is a reality, whether you perceive it or not. Without it we would perish."

"If what you say is true," I said, "there should be a Peking for every day of its existence."

"For every thousandth part of an instant, according to our concepts. They exist together in continuous time, the only real time."

I just couldn't get it. I would think I was beginning to understand what he was saying and find myself only more confused. "What are you talking about?" I asked him, and I was surprised at the annoyance I heard in my voice. "You're not explaining anything. You're just giving me a lot of analogies that don't hold—"

I was interrupted at that moment by



the ringing out of dozens of deep-toned bells, coming from everywhere, floating in through the halls and the windows and filling the room with their melody. I closed my eyes and the sound flooded my consciousness, and I knew that I was back in that dark, quiet library cellar and the tower clock was counting the hour and awakening me, and then the bells had stopped . . .

"Come," said Vacameth, taking my arm. "It is the summons to the palace of Kublai." He led me to the door. "There is so much we have to talk about," he said, quietly. "You will want to know how you came here, and I must yet find out why. We are gropers after truth here, you see. But you are correct in distrusting my analogies. So find all the fallacies of my words, and list all my crimes against logic. When you are done, bring them to me—*and then deny that you are here!*"

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CHAPTER III

I DON'T suppose I can put into words what I felt that first moment when I saw the sky. Everything that had gone before, turbulent fear and wonder, the torturing struggle to insinuate some vestige of reason what had happened, became obscured and unimportant. It had become impossible to doubt.

Vacameth and I had emerged from a great building, coming out into what seemed to be an immense garden. The earth was like a lawn, carelessly sprinkled with an abundance of flowers, and broad shade trees were everywhere, and over all this hung the afternoon sky, a cool, flawless blue infinity. This was the China sky, and this the China of medieval Asia. Somewhere east were the deserts of Persia and north rose unknown Siberia. Tibet, Burma, Ceylon, black Zanzibar, blazing India, cannibal Sumatra, all this vast ancient world of mystery and glory had become resurrected from the bleak tomb of time . . .

"What year is this?" I asked Vacameth, presently.

"In the Christian reckoning, 1271."

We walked for a mile along a broad, paved pathway that rose some three feet over the adjoining fields. I remembered that I had seen—the thought was an even greater incongruity—a man to whom both Vacameth and I had referred as Coleridge on such a pathway. When I asked him about it, Vacameth refused my question, telling me instead of the purpose of the path,

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which was to allow rain to settle on the fields without muddying the roads.

Vacameth spoke of other things. The two walls far behind us were the outer boundaries of Kanbalu, the battlements of the third wall that was before us, gleaming white against the green earth, enclosed an area four miles square. We entered by one of the two small south gates that flanked the Emperor's gate. This incredible palace filled the entire area. Its sides were ornamented with stone dragons, gilt warriors, birds, animals and panoramic scenes of battle, until they were lost in distance, and its towers were blazing with color. It had taken my breath away. I was half dizzy trying to get it all in, but the towers, as I looked at them, suddenly made me laugh.

"You are beginning to feel better?" Vacameth asked me.

"Uh-huh," I grinned at him. "I just remembered where I've seen part of this palace. It won't mean anything to you, but I'm thinking of a palace on Hollywood Boulevard where they show double features."

For a change, Vacameth didn't understand me, which was all right with me. I had come out of the stupor I had been in. The splendor and magnificence around me were too much to take all at once; I was glad to give up thinking about it, as I had felt an immeasurable relief when I had known, moments before, that all this was real and thinking useless.

Hundreds of others were going in our direction. All the paths converged on a flight of marble steps that led to the palace. The Khan, Vacameth told me, was holding a Public Court, which accounted for the host of people who had obviously come from far away lands.

"It is fortunate," he added, somberly, "that you arrived when you did. The apparitions of Vacameth the Saracen have lately given the Khan more dismay than joy. It is my hope that you will help me."

There wasn't time to ask him what he meant. I was to find out soon enough, but it was just about then that I first noticed that people had been looking at us with open smiles.

We went up the stairs and came into an enormous hall that must have held more than three thousand people. The crush on the outer fringe of the crowd was terrific. Most of the foreign visitors were there, sitting on carpets, gorging themselves and blowing off to each other about the gifts and curiosities they had brought the Khan.

At the north end of the hall, sitting high up on an elevation, was the mighty Kublai. Beneath him, arranged in a descending order according to rank, and none of them higher than the level of the Khan's feet, he looked down at his court, which beside the strangely dressed mass of foreigners, travelers and ambassadors, included his descendants down to his grandsons' wives, twenty-one legitimate sons, twenty-seven illegitimate sons, and hundreds of cavaliers, sorcerers, Christian priests, officers, falconers, heathen, Jewish and Mohammedan clergymen, astrologers and nobles.

Vacameth had been trying to make his way north, but it was impossible. We squatted on a carpet among a group of nobles who evidently knew Vacameth. Between mouthfuls, they greeted him and laughed when they asked about me. One of them in particular, a hairy son of a gun, wearing a jacket covered with decorations of elks' teeth, kept repeating that I had sad eyes like a donkey's.

After awhile it got under my skin and Vacameth noticed it. His moodiness had increased from the time we had entered the hall. I felt he was waiting

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I got on my knees and leaned over and pulled the front of his jacket into my fist

for something important to happen, and that something I knew would concern me. He leaned over now and whispered that I must be careful in how I dealt with nobles, since they had no understanding of who I was. ". . .

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as indeed," he muttered, "no one has."

I tried to make my eyes look less like a donkey's, but I suppose I didn't succeed, because the noble took hold of a huge bone, all he had left of what he had eaten, and threw it at me. "Here, donkey," he laughed, "nourishment for your ordeal."

I GOT on my knees and leaned over and pulled the front of his jacket into my fist. Then I waved the bone under his nose and I said, "You pull that stunt once more and the next jacket you get'll have your own teeth on it, savvy?"

He savvied and he let out a wild yell,

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and probably he would have started something if the Emperor hadn't taken a drink. The Emperor was served by an army of attendants, all of them veiled, and every time he drank, one of the pages presented him with his goblet. Immediately a band of forty or fifty musicians would begin to play, and everyone in the hall had to bow down in prostration. So the Emperor, taking a drink, probably stopped a small riot from blossoming, and I had an enemy.

The minute the Emperor stopped drinking, Vacameth grabbed me and led me farther north, taking advantage of the momentary lull to make progress. We ducked the dozens of stewards who were madly running about with huge trays, carrying mountains of roast birds, game and fish, and gold flagons of milk from mares, camels and cows, and sat down in a gang that was distinguished from the rest by the white robes they wore, most of them like mine, though several also bore Vacameth's silver crest.

I was startled by the man who sat beside me. His head would have fascinated an anthropologist; a heavy, blunt, sloping skull, a wide mouth with a mere suggestion of lips, hair thick and matted—a perfect living specimen of a Neanderthal man. His huge teeth kept tearing away chunks of meat, and his little eyes roamed restlessly around the hall.

I was staring at his powerful, hairy forearms when Vacameth suddenly whispered, above deafening applause, "You will be called shortly." A troupe of tumblers had come into the hall and begun to entertain.

"Called? For what?"

"There is no time now to explain. Sufficient that the Emperor holds no belief in the astrologers who labor in the Court of Time. He tolerates us chiefly for the sake of amusement. This you must provide for him when you are called."

"Who—me? What am I supposed to do?"

"You are intelligent. Tell the court of your native land, of the people who dwell in it, of any marvelous things it may contain, but above all, be entertaining. It is vastly important for all of us."

Looking at his aged face and seeing his undisguised anxiety, I knew that he was touching upon the thing that had obviously been weighing on his mind from the moment we had started for the palace. The tumblers were retiring, and the Khan was looking expectantly in our direction. The applause and laughter died away as Vacameth took hold of me with a trembling hand and led me forward. We both kneeled.

The Khan spoke. "I have been apprised, learned doctor, that you bring a visitor of most unusual circumstance this day. Let him speak."

I stood there foolishly, unable to utter a syllable. As he had pushed forward. I had glimpsed the face of the man whom I had called Coleridge, and the sight had unnerved me. Or perhaps it was the thought that I was about to speak to Kublai Khan—not awe or anythink like it, but just the thought itself. Conceding reality had been one thing while I remained a spectator. It was quite a different thing now.

"Is he incapable of speech?" said the Khan, his round, pink face reflecting disappointment. He looked so small as he sat there, lost in the magnificence and luxury of his surroundings.

"Speak, I beg you!" Vacameth whispered frantically.

I tried to find Coleridge again, but he was one insignificant figure in that vast sea of faces, all smiling, waiting to be amused. I had determined to make

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it good.

"Great Khan," I began, "I come from a land where men dwell in houses as high as mountains, reaching to the sky. Millions live close together in cities, laboring at their tasks, eating food that has come to them from all corners of the earth. Many of them travel in iron wagons that run with the power taken from waterfalls, or made by the spinning of huge wheels, or in wagons which move because they cause a spark to ignite a liquid taken from the bowels of the earth.

"Our people work at contrivances that can sew, or do mathematical problems, or dig great ditches. Our fields are cultivated by machines whose power is so great that whether a man sows or reaps of threshes, a single man may perform the labor of hundreds . . ."

THERE had been isolated gasps of laughter, but for the most part the hall remained silent. The Khan was listening with a frown, and the others followed his example. Vacameth whispered, "You must sound more coherent!" I shrugged and kept going.

"We have ships that sail not because of wind, but fire, and some of our ships descend under the sea, like fish. So too, we have ships that can carry scores of people, flying like birds, past three hundred mile posts in an hour. We can make our voices heard a thousand miles away; we can dispel darkness with lanterns as bright as day; we can capture a scene forever, by means—"

The Emperor raised a hand and I stopped. "Tell me," he said, "where is this wonderful land?"

"If one travels west, perhaps twenty thousand miles away—if east, a fifth that distance, for my people know the earth to be round."

"Enough," said the Khan, and he fixed his gaze on Vacameth. "Most learned doctor, when credulity departs, it is accompanied by amusement." He waved a hand, and as Vacameth led me away, the musicians began to play and jugglers came running forward.

Shortly afterward, one of the nobles who stood near the Khan came to Vacameth and spoke quietly to him. Vacameth's face blanched and after that he sat quietly, refusing to eat or drink. Occassionally one or another of those men who wore the silver crests muttered something to him, sometimes looking at me. But I was hungry, and I divided my attention between the food and searching for Coleridge.

Pre-occupied as he was, Vacameth hadn't missed anything. When the last of the singers and dancers had performed and the Public Court had come to end, he rose and consulted the men who had spoken to him. Then he said to me, "I must leave you now for a time. The white robe you wear is your protector and guide. If you are lost, there are those who will know where to send you. Go now and do what you will, and come to me again before nightfall in that building where we met."

He took my hand again and looked at me carefully before he added, "But in one matter, though I cannot enforce it, I beg you to be cautious. If you meet the man Coleridge again, do not speak to him. Have nothing to do with him. I cannot say what the end may be if you disobey."

"You're asking for my word?" I said, as he waited for an answer.

"Yes."

"I can't promise. I must speak to him. Whatever meaning there is in this seems to be tied up with him."

As Vacameth left with the others, I knew I was right. He had been startled by my answer. I had betrayed knowledge of something which he had been certain he alone knew.

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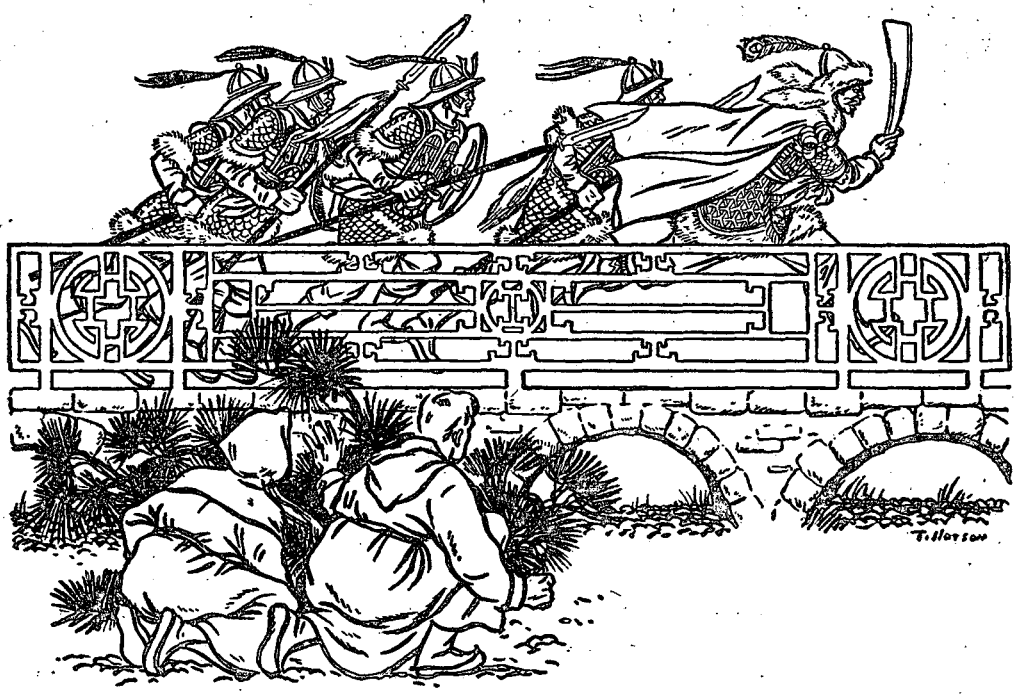

CHAPTER IV

HALF an hour later I saw Coleridge. Leaving the palace, I had given up the hopeless task of searching for him and let myself be swept along with the crowds. After a time I had passed through the second wall and found myself in the market place of the city. I became accustomed to the way people kept looking at me and wandered around in that fascinating bedlam, listening to the haggling, examining the worked leather, wood, stone, silver, bronze and innumerable combinations of these media and what craftsmen had done with them, taking little tastes of the puddings and roasts and soups that were offered to me, feeling the strange materials, gorgeous and undoubtedly very expensive, and yet hung out in the open marketplace, smelling the perfumes and perspiration and cooking odors that blended into one exotic, pungent smell.

All at once Coleridge had come up beside me. He was no longer wearing the white robe in which I had caught sight of him and was dressed instead in a long hooded gown that might have been a monk's.

"Here," he said, hurriedly, pressing a bundle of cloth against me. "Wear these and meet me presently at the side of a lake which lies east of the market, not far from here."

A moment later he was gone, lost in the jostling mob.

I went into a narrow alley and unfolded the bundle. It was a drab brown

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gown like the one Coleridge had worn, and with it a pair of open leather sandals. Waiting for a moment when the alley was empty, I slipped the gown over the rest of my clothes. I sat down and tore off my colorful socks, and just as I was putting on the leather sandals, a brown little soldier, encased in armor the size of a small beer barrel, appeared at one end of the alley.

He stood there with a calm display of interest, then came over and picked up the white sandals I had discarded, scowling at me.

I got up and said, "What's on your mind, Joe?"

Joe didn't answer. He merely waggled the white sandals at me, and when I walked out of the alley, he followed. I started through the market and he dogged me. I stopped to admire something and he waited. When I caught his eyes, he shook the sandals at me.

The market was too crowded to try running. I was about a foot taller than most of the people, and even with a slight lead I would be like a beacon. What I needed was a good lead. On the other hand, I had enough enemies already: Pai-Lo and his buddies, the guy who thought I looked like a donkey, and maybe soon Vacameth. I decided one more wouldn't matter particularly, so I looked around and found a tent that was strung with long banners of different cloths.

The Cathian merchant who owned it wanted to know what a monk was doing among lengths of gold cloth. I invited him inside, and Joe came along. When I found a good long section of cloth that I liked, a lovely streamer of green silk, I maneuvered the merchant between Joe and me.

Then I smiled piously, shoved the Cathaian against the soldier, yanked down the green silk and spun it around them. I had about three full spins around them before they even started bellowing. A swift kick to Joe's unarmored section knocked them both to the ground and I pushed my way through the throngs that came pouring into the tent.

Coleridge wasn't there when I got to the lake. I wondered if I had come to the wrong place, or whether . . . but there was no sense trying to figure out what might have happened to him. It was quiet here by the lake, and I sat on a stone bench under a shade tree. These were the fields that lay between the first two walls, and though a fair-sized city was contained within them, fallow deer grazed peacefully not far away. And the lake, clear as though it was but a few inches deep, was filled with large fish.

An old man sat down beside me, wheezing from the exertion of his walking. "I am a stranger," I said. "Is one permitted to fish here?"

"These be the Khan's fish," he sighed. "Fish if thou wilt. It will cost thee thine head."

As far as I was concerned, the conversation was ended. But the old man blinked at me merrily and said, "Thou art a strange monk indeed, with a face so pale in this land of constant sun. And if it were I who waited thus for a friend in dangerous circumstance, I would draw me my cowl over my head, and straightaway tuck in the white robe that peeps from beneath thy gown."

The trailing sleeves of the white robe had come out from under the gown. I shoved it out of sight and stared at the old man. "How do you know who I'm waiting for?" I said.

" 'Twas he who sent me, being unable to meet thee. Our friend Coleridge bids thee to bide the time until he will come again to thee. It is his hope to come tonight, when thou mayest, if it please thee, join him in an ad-

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venture fraught with danger and romance." He rose from the bench and seemed about to leave.

"WAIT a minute!" I cried, jumping up. "I don't understand this business. Who are you?"

"A simple man, an Englishman, a friend to both, and like thee, a traveler from an age distant to this. For in my own age, three hundred and some years hence, I am known as Broderick the miller, though the binding of ancient books is my pleasure. And now I must leave."

"I'll walk along with you," I said.

"A short way and no more," he sighed as I joined him. "We are forbidden commerce, as Vacameth has doubtless told thee."

"He warned me against Coleridge, but why you?"

"Because I might aid both him and thee, as forsooth, I have."

"But why can't I see Coleridge?"

A man astride a donkey rode past and Broderick turned his face away. Under his blue tunic I caught a glimpse of the same white robe that I was wearing. Evidently he too had been forced to disguise himself.

"Vacameth fears the link that binds thee to Coleridge," he said.

"Then there is a link?"

"'Twas known from the manner of thine appearance here, for thou emerged from air, as did all of us, yet with this difference, as the soldiers of Prince Sevasta swore—thou wert already walking beside Coleridge, engaged in conversation."

"But why should Vacameth fear this link?"

"This question, and the hundred others which I perceive trembling upon thy tongue, thou must ask Vacameth, for here we part company." He turned away from the lake and began walking in the direction of the third wall. A squad of soldiers, hanging on to the sides of a pony wagon, rumbled by. After they had gone, Broderick the miller turned and called, "Remember my message, false monk!"

It was night when Coleridge came to me. The city was asleep; an hour before the curfew bells had tolled in the new city of Taidu, across the river. I had given up seeing him when I glimpsed the shadow of his form coming through the arch that led to the balcony.

Until this moment the hours had dragged and my interest in the life around me had become perfunctory. Towards evening I had seen Vacameth again, and we had sat together on this same balcony, sipping spiced wine. He had evaded all my questions, begging my patience, and though he was anxious to know about the world from which I had come, he returned the favor by giving me the history of the city of Taidu. When I had mentioned Coleridge, he remembered how tired he was and left soon after.

But now I would find out. I had to fight to keep calm.

"Boland, are you here?"

"Here," I whispered, reaching out and touching him. My eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and I could see that he was still wearing his hooded gown, the cowl raised to form a peaked cap.

"Good. Put on your monk's gown and come with me."

This was absurd, meaningless. He was talking to me as if we had known each other a long time, as if we were two friends about to undertake some casual, if clandestine, errand. He had even called me by my name. I just couldn't get it.

"Why do you hesitate?" he said, anxiously. "You haven't changed your

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mind, have you?"

"No," I said, finding my gown and putting it on. I had hidden it under my couch. "I'm ready."

We dropped from the balcony to the garden below, and began to run quietly along one of the raised pathways, heading, I thought, for the third inner wall where the palace was. Above us the waning moon was like a disinterested eye staring down from the black heavens. We kept running for several minutes, then all at once, though there was no sound to indicate pursuit, he pulled me from the path and made me lie down in the shadow of the pathway.

MINUTES of unbroken stillness went by, then I saw a faint light in the distance, rapidly joined by others. Soon sandaled feet came pattering by overhead, and armor jingled as groups of soldiers ran past our hiding place. After a time we crept out and saw their lanterns like fireflies far away. We left the path and headed across the fields.

The battlements of the third wall were before us, cold and gray in the moonlight. The lanterns of sentries flickered near the gates, but we skirted the wall, Coleridge peering about carefully. Soon he found a large boulder which he moved to one side with surprising ease. From under it he took a long hemp rope with a heavy pronged hook tied to one end. We went farther along the wall until he stopped, swung the hook in a circle over his head and let it fly. It caught in one of the notches of the parapet and held against his weight.

"Follow me over the wall," he said, quietly.

Once over the wall, we kept to the outer boundaries of the palace gardens, soon passing the smaller palace where Chingis, eldest son of Kublai, lived. And here a hill rose darkly, rising gradually for perhaps a hundred feet, its surface completely covered with hundreds of magnificent evergreen trees. Coleridge had stopped again.

Presently I heard a hushed, lovely melody, picked out on strings, coming, it seemed, from nowhere. Suddenly the darkness was lifting from the hill and I could see to its summit where a domed pavilion stood, and there was no longer darkness that was a pattern of shadows, but an unbelievable mixture of deep, subdued color, with every blade of grass a distinct thing, and each tree clearly defined, until I felt that something had been pushed aside before us, something that had hidden this before the music had come down from the pavilion.

It seemed to me that I had been here before, that this was the creation of memory, too prefect for reality. Then I felt a chill run through me. Coleridge was talking quietly as he stood beside me, talking to himself, speaking words that I knew, the words of his poem!

"So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree
And here were forests, ancient as the hills . . ."

I found myself walking again, upward, past a brook whose surface shone like black glass—something sprang up from a little glen and ran straight at us! A moment afterward it had swerved and brushed by. It had been a sleeping deer we had startled.

Near the summit, Coleridge said, "Stand here and be my sentry. If the soldiers of Prince Sevasta approach, do not hesitate to cry out at once!" I

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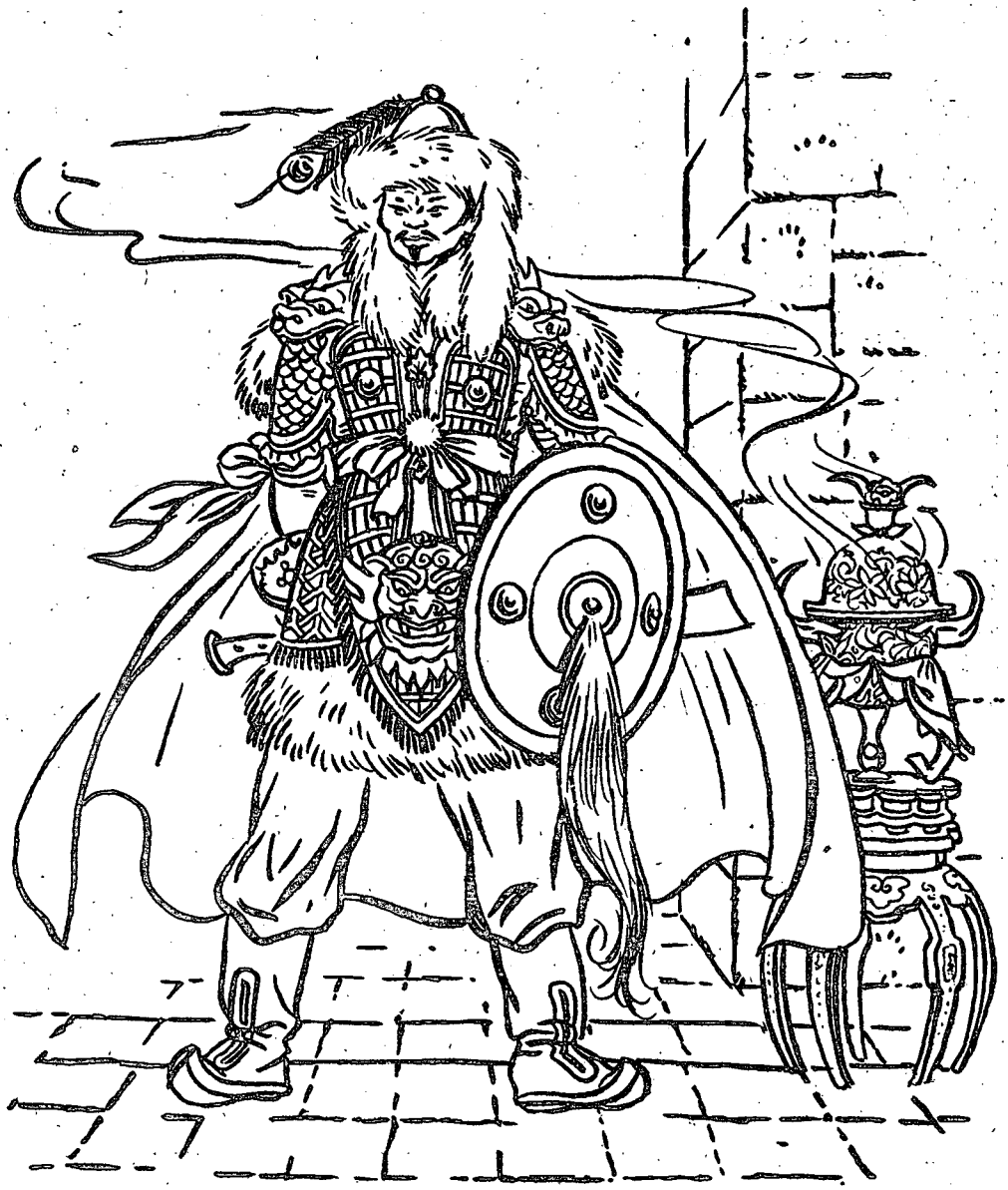

Among them was the nobleman with whom I had quarreled at the Public Court

watched him as he walked to the very top of the hill. When he reached the first tiny ornamental gate, the thin strain of melody stopped.

Later, I could barely remember what had happened. There was no sequence, but only something instantaneous and already completed at the moment of its beginning. Had there been a girl coming toward Coleridge? I had seen her flowing robe, the stateliness of her carriage, and as she had opened her arms, a jewel, perhaps a bracelet, had struck the moonlight a glancing, brilliant blow.

Or had that sudden sliver of light come from the lantern which Vacameth

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had lit beside me? Light and the sound of his voice had come together.

"You shouldn't have come," he said, and his lantern had destroyed everything. When I looked quickly to the pavilion again, it was empty. There might never have been anyone there. Only this sickly lantern remained, throwing distorted shadows along the slope of the hill. The shimmering magic of the night had dissolved, and the moon gave no light.

VACAMETH and I went back through the palace gardens in silence. Before we reached the south gate, footsteps as soft as rain were patting the earth on all sides of us. Dozens of lanterns, their faint radiance often reflected against fluted armor, were converging at the gate, and when we reached them, silent squads of palace guards and soldiers were waiting.

They had known Vacameth by his white robe, but their faces showed shock when they recognized me, for among them was Pai-Lo, he who had called me the Saracen's apparition once long ago, and the nobleman with whom I had quarreled at the Public Court. An incredulous murmur ran among them, but they made on effort to impede us. Vacameth had opened the front of my monk's gown and shown them the white cloth underneath. Then opened the gate and let us through.

Presently Vacameth had led me back to that long corridor where life had pulsed through the day. It was dark and empty now. We entered a chamber where a man lay sleeping, and from there to numerous others, until we had quietly traversed a circle that led back to the corridor. There had been sleepers in every chamber, men and women with strangely different faces, some who had slept peacefully, others who had tossed and mumbled, a few who had stirred at the passage of our light. Close by each had been a folded white robe and a diversity of other articles; a dagger, a Bible, once a coat of chain mail; and in that room where I again saw the brute who had been in the court, as he lay crouched on the floor, in his hands had been a leathern bag of round stones.

We returned to the chamber where I had first seen Vacameth. He sat on the broad sill of his window, the moonlight flooding past him to lie in a white pool on the floor.

"Among those you saw," Vacameth spoke, "was a Frankish crusader, whose lifetime is separated from this night by a hundred years. He found himself in Acre, among the last of his comrades, surrounded in their camp by the infidels they had come to conquer. Yesterday, as he knew it, he was wounded, and he lay dying in an alien land. He vowed, while fever and delirium ran through him, that he would yet see the glory of that land he had always heard about, believing the promises of those who had led him. And so he came here. He has been here four days. He may return to his own time at the moment of his death, perhaps never knowing that the glory he sought belonged to another age . . .

"You saw a primitive being, a man not yet Man, unable to speak or comprehend his surroundings. He is rare even in this Court of Time, coming from an age many thousands of years gone. What brought him here? Perhaps an incalculable wonder as he saw the sun rise each day, or watched the chemistry of age change his forbears. The thought remained a vague stirring in his crude brain, but for one intense moment he must have perceived a continuity. He must have known then that day would follow day, and time alter all things. Half animal though he is,

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something in him cried out to span numberless days—to see what might be in a time when he would be no more.

"So you have all come, travelers through time, brought here by some great emotion that unlocks the doors that separate the ages. Passion, fear, piety, lust—some transcendant emotion—and the knowledge which is ours in this Court of Time."

He turned to me for the first time since he had begun to speak, his eyes blank, unseeing fields.

"We know so little, as I have told you," he said softly, "but one thing we know . . . our knowledge will be lost! This is the thought that haunts us. All our work is directed toward finding the faulty link in the chain of the future. None of those who has come here knows of this phenomenon of transference through time. It is unknown fifty years from now, as it is unknown in your day. But we must find that flaw and we must alter it! Our knowledge must persist!

"Do you understand? We must guard against everything. The man Coleridge came here from a secret, scarcely realized yearning to see this land, and from unhappiness in his own time. When you came, you were already with him. Can you help me discover why?"

"I don't know, unless . . ." I hesitated. "He was a famous poet even before his death, but the greatest of his poems was never finished. It was a poem he had written about this land and the court of the Khan. I always felt—"

"You felt it had to be finished?" Vacameth whispered.

"Yes," I said. "It had always affected me . . . deeply."

"Alas!" cried the old man, shaking his head. "This is a link which we, in our ignorance, must fear. Never before has anyone come because of another who preceded him."

"But you must have known I was coming!" I said. "There were soldiers guarding him, as if they were waiting for me."

"No," said Vacameth, turning away. "They were the soldiers of Prince Sevasta, and the guards of the Court of Time. I cannot tell you why he is so closely guarded. You must not inquire, you must not think the thoughts that are with you even as I speak. Know then—the poem of which you speak could never have been finished!"

"But why?" I said, and the thoughts to which Vacameth had referred became a rushing whirlpool drawing me to a hidden vortex, and I was remembering . . . *The author . . . composed no less than three hundred lines, if that indeed can be called composition in which the images rose up as things. . . .*

"There was more!" I said. "Tonight I heard him speaking the lines of his poem!"

"That was yesterday."

"But I was there—a short time ago!"

"Do you remember how everything in your perception changed when you approached the Green Mount? That was because he had taken you with him again, to a day past. You were seeing things as he saw them, in a yesterday that will never change for him. . . ."

"But it must change! You said yourself that you were searching for a lost link. If the past can be altered he can finish the poem—I don't understand—"

"Your understanding is of no consequence!" Vacameth cried, rising up, anger flaming in his eyes. "Heed my warning. If you go again with him to the Green Mount, yours will be a punishment as terrible as his . . . *I will take away from you all remembrance of that which will be most precious to you!"*

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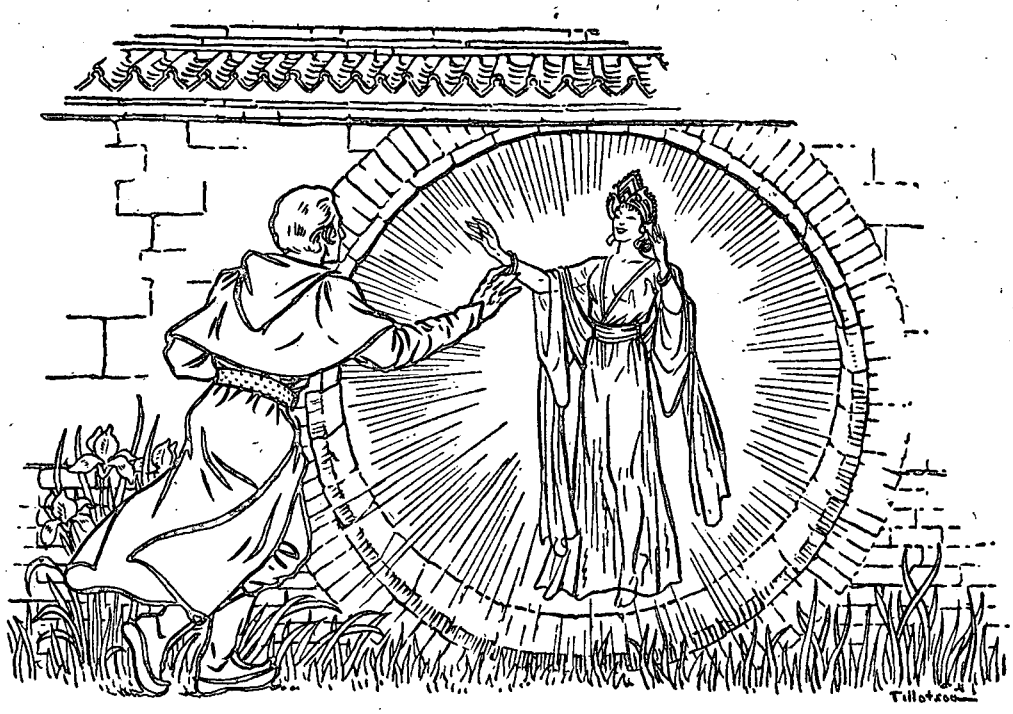

CHAPTER V

I WAS unable to sleep that night. Again I would remember that veiled moment when the light had flashed and everything had vanished like a substanceless dream, and hear again a faint melody and a voice beside me, speaking the lines I knew so well . . .

"And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread . . ."

In the morning, exhausted, I put on my white robe again. I had no eyes now for the girls who brought me food, but eating as quickly as I could, I went out into the morning.

There was no question in my mind as to whether I would take Vacameth's warning. I felt that I couldn't have done anything about it if I had wanted to; I was in too far, and a strange compulsion was forcing me to go on. So I wandered through the city of Kanbalu, searching for Coleridge, but there was no trace of him.

It was late in the afternoon when I came again to the lake where I had spoken to Broderick the miller—and there, sitting on that same stone bench, sat Coleridge! I ran to him and called his name. He turned with a cry of joy and grabbed my hand.

"I hoped you would remember!" he cried. "I had no way of getting another message to you and I looked for

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you everywhere."

"We must get away from here," I said, hurriedly. "The guards must be near and I must talk to you before—"

"Have no fear," he laughed. "Vacameth himself forbade their interference several hours ago."

"Vacameth! But why?"

"Why is no concern of mine. I revel in this freedom, and would it had come earlier, for then I might have been able to come to you last night to ask your aid, as good Broderick told you."

"Last night?" I said in sudden confusion. "But you did come!"

He seemed startled for a moment, then he laughed again. "You're making sport of me. You Colonials are a droll lot indeed. I wanted to convey my compliments on the excellence of the discourse you presented to the Public Court yesterday. The colonies will go far, now they're free of England, even if they never reach that magic state."

"The colonies? . . ."

"Yes. Didn't you say you came from America?"

"When did I tell you this?"

He looked at me dubiously, and the smile left his face. "I believe you are fatigued," he said. Your eyes are shot through with blood, your hands are unsteady. Would you rather leave off for another time?"

"I'm all right. Tell me when I said these things."

He answered slowly: "When you first arrived. You were walking on a pathway behind me when I turned and saw you, and the odd clothes you wore. We talked until the soldiers came. You fought them and created considerable devastation until one crept up behind you. It was your splendid combativeness that resolved me to ask your aid."

"Yes, I remember," I lied. "This dream that came alive bewilders me sometimes." I had realized by then everything that lay between us. The man who was here beside me was also a century and a half removed from me. I could have told him the name of his next poem, the next place he would live, the success of a book—the date of his death! "Tell me," I said. "You want me to help you in some way?"

"In an affair of the heart. I say it plain." He was smiling again, and he was a different man from the one he had been the night before. His voice was bouyant, alive; he seemed a happy man indeed, this Coleridge whose biographies were—or were to be—the story of a melancholy life.

"How can I help you?" I said.

"Each man comes here seeking something, as you must know from Vacameth. Yesterday I met an Abyssinian maid, with whom I fell in love—"

"Yesterday?"

"Ah," he sighed, smiling, "it must have been the day before. The days here have lost their meaning; they have been the happiest of my life. But meet her I did, and our love is all that matters. She is the Princess Kalay, sent here by her father to serve the Empress. When we realized our love, I went at once to Vacameth and told him. He forbade me to see her again, because Sevasta had already been to him.

"We travelers from other times are deemed charlatans and story-tellers, as you know. Kublai protects us as a whim, but should he withdraw his benevolence and subsidies, the Court of Time would cease to exist. This Vacameth fears more than anything, being, I have heard, engrossed in labors dear to him. And the Princess Kalay is also the unwilling object of the Prince Sevasta's love. Sevasta is a mighty Captain, possessor of a golden tablet, friend of the Bailo Singui and other to whom the Kublai gives ear.

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"When Sevasta heard of my love for Kalay, he threatened Vacameth. He sent his soldiers to guard against our meeting. But it will not avail him, for Kalay sent a message to me with a servant, bidding me meet her when I could on the summit of the Green Mount. She waits for me tonight and I will go to her.

"And here, friend Boland, you may help me, for I will need a sentry against Sevasta's soldiers. You are tall and strong, and from your laughter during yesterday's combat, you find pleasure in a fight. Will you do me this service?"

I COULDN'T answer for awhile, then I managed to ask him, "Have you ever met her on this Green Mount?"

"Never before, but tonight will be the first of many."

"But . . . in time . . . you will leave here. There must be a parting someday. What do you hope to accomplish with this hopeless love?"

"I do not think of that. I have been here an eternity already, and when I leave, I will take with me this memory, more precious than anything in life."

A chill swept through me as he spoke those words, the echo of Vacameth's warning: *"Yours will be a punishment as terrible as his . . . I will take away all remembrance of that which will be most precious to you . . ."*

"Will you help me?"

"Yes," I nodded. "I must help you."

He came again that night, shortly after the curfew bells had darkened the city. I was on the balcony, waiting, when his white-robed figure came hurrying along the court wall and leaped down. The moon, which tonight would be a thin crescent, had not risen.

"Come," said Coleridge, taking my hand.

The moment he touched me, everything changed. The moon, as if some great hand had suddenly thrown it there, shone down from the night sky. The darkness faded into the somber colors I had seen the night before, and remembering how I had first noticed the transformation at the foot of the Green Mount, I realized that it had happened before then, and only my perception had been at fault.

When we ran along the path, it seemed to me that the very rhythm of our footsteps was a repetition. We left the path and hid again, long before pursuit appeared, and when it had passed us, we headed across the fields again. At precisely the same place, Coleridge found the boulder and the hemp rope under it, and threw it over the walls.

"Follow me," he whispered, as he had the night before. . . .

And now, as we came in sight of the Green Mount, I knew what Vacameth had meant when he said, *"That was yesterday."* For in every minute detail, this was yesterday—the soft rattle of a displaced pebble, its wet, upturned surface reflecting the light, the alarming gust of wind that shook a young tree before us—even that moment when Coleridge snapped a twig and awakened a sleeping deer!

I knew the meaning of fear then more than I had ever known it. I felt as if I had to remember to keep breathing, and I dragged myself closer to the origin of that ghostly melody, hearing the hushed voice beside me speaking to itself . . . *"A damsel with a dulcimer in a vision one I saw . . ."* And yet, somehow I knew I had to be careful, to see exactly what happened. I watched him reach the gate. I saw the girl coming toward him—saw her raise her arms and the light flash!—and the instant disintegrated.

There, a few feet away, stood Vacameth, a circle of soldiers all around him, and the empty hill yellow from

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their lanterns.

I was too exhausted to resist them when they sprang at me and tied my hands behind my back. A slender man, taller than the rest, and wearing a pointed helmet and a silver cape, approached me. He regarded me wonderingly and stuck out a curled blade to touch me, as if he was unsatisfied that I was really there.

He whirled about in anger and cried, his thin face drawn together, "Cursed Saracen! Rid this mount of your apparition!" He swung his long blade at me as if debating whether to sink it into my ribs, but Vacameth hurried forward between me and the blade.

"I have given you my word, Sevasta," he said, with a cold, weary dignity. "It will never happen again."

He held out a hand, and a servant brought him a goblet and a tiny metal vial. With trembling hands he opened the vial and held it over the goblet. A single drop of liquid stretched tenuously down and the goblet lit up as if with an inner fire.

"Drink."

He held the goblet to my lips and tilted it. There was no taste, scarcely any sensation at all.

PRINCE Sevasta went behind me and with a single, quick stroke of his blade, cut the cords that tied my hands.

"And now that your fool's magic is done," he spat out contemptuously, "leave while there is mercy in me!"

The soldiers spread out in a semicircle, their lanterns a scimitar lighting our way, and Vacameth and I walked to the gate. When they left us, Vacameth spoke to me. There was no anger, no emotion in him now, but only a vast, yielding weariness.

"I hoped to the last that you would listen to me. This morning, seeing you still sought him, I let you meet. I thought you must realize that I had spoken the truth when I warned you."

"I couldn't stop," I mumbled. "I realized only how inextricably woven together my being here was with his, and when I discovered at last why he had never finished his poem—"

"I told you it could never be finished. He came here seeking happiness, and he might have returned with it, for all happiness is but the memory of its existence. But now he rises each morning and happiness seems to wait for him, and he goes each night on his secret errand, slipping at the very instant he begins back to that last night when he was almost in her arms.

"It will always be the same; he will never find her. As long as he is here, complete happiness will elude him. And when he returns to his own time, then will the full force of his punishment come to dwell with him . . . for he will never remember more than a fragment! Time has stopped for him, and so it will be until he dies."

We had returned to the looming shadows of the Court of Time. Vacameth took my hand and said gently, "And so it will be for you. This most precious memory, this realization of the reason he never finished his poem, will be lost. When you awake again, everything that happened tonight—these very words I speak to you—will be gone from your memory. Between your last waking moment and your first waking one, the slate will be wiped clean. So long as you remain here, you may go with him each night on his errand to the Green Mount. No one will see you, no one will hear you. For it will be yesterday again, the yesterday that never ends. And when you return to your own time, you will be haunted by this elusive, incomplete memory . . ."

But there was something he hadn't reckoned with.

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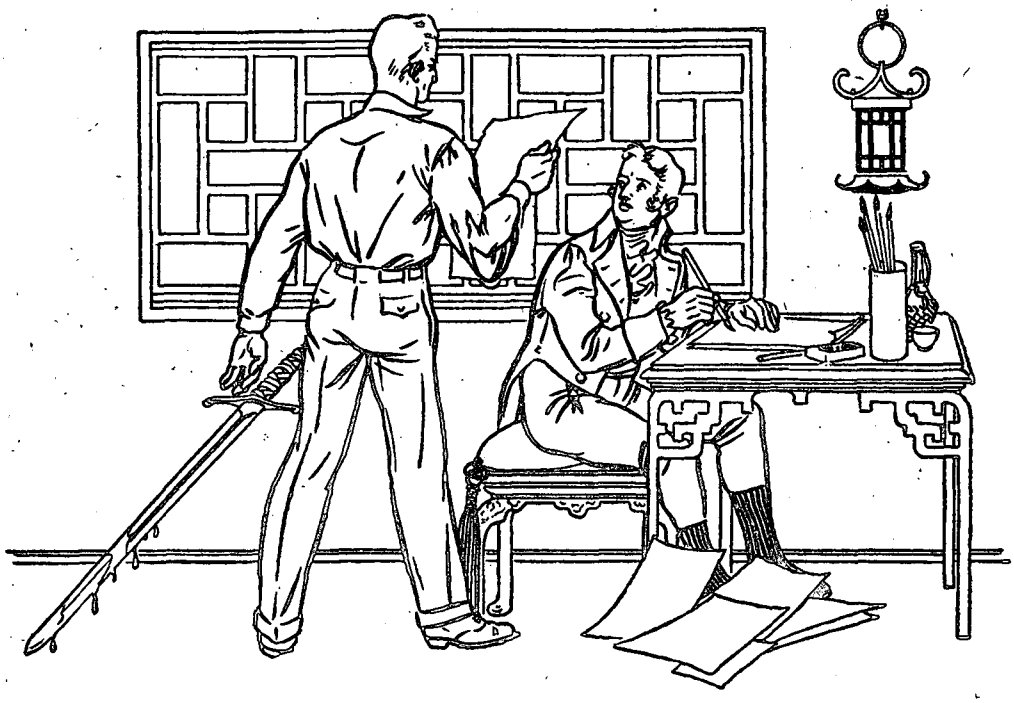

CHAPTER VI

IT STRUCK me even as Vacameth walked away. Before I would awaken again, he had said. That meant I had time still, for until I went to sleep I could remember, and I wasn't going to sleep just yet.

Searching my pockets, I found a handful of matches. I went into the Court and went down the corridor to the door where Vacameth had taken me the night before. Then I started going through the chambers where Vacameth's travelers lay sleeping, striking matches in each room, until I came to where I had seen the coat of mail. Beside it, in a heavy scabbard, lay a huge broadsword. I strapped it on and kept going.

If I was right! And so far I was—Coleridge lay asleep in one of the chambers. I struck a match and awakened him. He jerked up and recognized me.

"Why didn't you come?" I whispered. "I've been waiting."

He got up immediately and dressed. He seemed bewildered at the thought that he had fallen asleep. He couldn't thank me enough for coming to get him. When he saw the great sword hanging at my side, it alarmed him, but he said nothing.

And this time, when we came outside and the night had become transformed, I was ready for it and the moonlight filled me with elation. We were back in that yesterday when Coleridge had first failed to see this girl that meant so much to him. This time it would be different!

I let him lead me as he had done

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twice before. I let the hurrying soldiers pass and climbed the wall with him. I had determined my course of action in advance, but as we crept through the Khan's garden I became uncertain. Had it been necessary to change everything that had happened that night? Had I made an error in not doing each little thing in some new way—or would one faulty link in this chain of events be enough to make the difference? Maybe, I thought, the events were leading me! Maybe the entire pattern was inescapable, and no matter what I planned, I would have to re-live that pattern!

I gripped Coleridge's arm. "Not this way," I whispered. "We must avoid the palace of Chingis and approach the Mount from another way."

He looked at me wonderingly. "But this is the way," he said. "I have been over it many time by day."

"I see the lanterns of soldiers ahead."

"Where? I see nothing. You are mistaken."

"Believe me, my eyes see farther than yours."

He hesitated, as if the decision was beyond him, and finally, reluctantly, he nodded in agreement. We started skirting the inner wall of the palace, but after we had taken a few steps, he stopped. "We cannot go this way," he said. "There is a river between the Mount and the palace, and the only bridge across is well guarded."

The events were leading me! There was nothing I could do. I went back with him, wondering what to do. In a panic I waited for the moment when he would kick away the pebble and saw it happen . . . and I waited for the precise instant when the wind would stir again, and I heard it. It would be over presently, before anything had been—but no!—for together with the wakening of the deer, I had drawn my broadsword.

In blind, frightened flight, it came toward us, its lovely head arched straight forward as it sped ahead. I raised the huge sword over my head and the instant it brushed by I brought the blade down. The cruel stroke caught its spine, almost cutting the poor animal in two. It fell to the ground at our feet like a stone, without a whimper, without ever knowing what had happened to it.

And then, sickened though I was, I realized that Coleridge had not even seen what I had done. He was scrambling on ahead, as if the music were drawing him, oblivious of everything else. I ran after him, the bloody sword in my hand. I dreaded each moment that sped by.

Before I could get to him, he had left the shelter of the last trees that surrounded the bald summit. The music stopped . . . I saw him open the little gate. I crept closer and heard a girl's voice call to him. The Princess Kalay appeared, walking toward him across the terrace, her arms outstretched, waiting for him. In spite of myself, an involuntary shudder ran through me and I closed my eyes.

When I looked again—they were gone! In despair I ran to the pavilion, leaped over the gate. And there they were, standing together in the shadow of a broad cupola, in each other's arms! It had worked! Whatever had prevented these two from meeting that first night had failed this time.

I EDGED back across the terrace, unwilling to intrude, and started back down the hill. Tomorrow I would see Coleridge again; tomorrow when this poem had been completed in his mind, and then . . . What then, I wondered. I would hear all of the poem, and with the little stub of a pencil and

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the scraps of paper I had in my trousers pockets, I would copy the rest of it! Even then, while vague apprehensions of the enormity of this change were beginning to take form in my mind, I suddenly thought—what if tomorrow I were gone? What if he were gone?

I couldn't conceive it, I suppose. I thought to myself: if he returns now to his own time and finishes the poem—then everything connected with it would change! Instead of a fragment of a poem, when I next looked into that little red volume of Coleridge's poetry, I would find all of it there! And that would mean that from that summer's day in 1797 on, every reference to this poem would be changed . . .

The Author's Note would be different. The letter Lamb had written Wordsworth about it would be unwritten. The *Edinburgh Review,* which had ridiculed the poem when it appeared in 1816, would have an entirely new review of it. The pamphlet in which Coleridge had published *Kublai Khan,* together with *Christabel* and *The Pains of Sleep*, would be changed altogether, every copy of it. Every reference, every text, every collection of poems, every treatise, every high-school boy's exam, every memory that anyone had ever had about this poem would be changed.

It was impossible. It couldn't happen. Somewhere, something was to recast this new form in which events were taking shape. My mind refused to think about it anymore.

Suddenly, from where I stood, I saw figures running. I crept in closer and saw Vacameth and Prince Sevasta standing at the foot of the hill, in the middle of a score of soldiers, like ghostly figures in the moonlight. A soldier had just come running to Sevasta.

"Sire!" he panted, "The man you seek is even now with the Princess Kalay in the pavilion!"

"Nonsense," said Vacameth, irritably. "No one could have reached the pavilion without awakening some of the animals that sleep on the Mount. Recover your senses. We depend on the swift perceptions of the animals for our alarm."

"But look!" the soldier cried, holding out his hands. "Here are my palms, wet with the blood of a roe newly slain upon the Mount!"

Prince Sevasta cried out in fury. "Surround the Mount at once! Pai-Lo, race immediately to summon the palace guards! And you, deceitful Saracen, follow me to witness the end of your dupe!"

Vacameth clutched the Prince's arm, begging him to be calm, promising him to undo the harm. He would be successful, I knew. Sevasta would allow Vacameth to punish Coleridge, and the end would be the same. The deer had been a link, but it alone had not been enough. And while Vacameth pleaded with the Prince, I had time.

I ran back to the pavilion, calling Coleridge's name. He heard me, and came out from under the cupola, Kalay still with him, both of them frightened. He looked at me strangely and said, "Who are you? What do you want with me?"

I looked down at my clothes. The white robe I had been wearing was gone. I was dressed in the tweed suit I had worn underneath. In fear and amazement I cried, "They've found you! Sevasta and his soldiers have surrounded the hill! Save your questions and follow me!"

I had to shove him to make him move. He took the girl's hand and ran after me across the pavilion. I was going down the other side of the Mount, hoping to avoid Sevasta. But it was too late! Already a string of lanterns

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were ascending the hill and we could hear the soldiers calling to each other. We stood flat against a huge tree and waited for the soldiers to come up. Everywhere there was movement; as Vacameth had said, the Mount had been filled with sleeping animals that sought its shelter at night.

Closer and closer the lights came. I raised the great sword over my head and stood steady. The steady sound of their advancement continued until the light of a lantern touched the tips of my shoes. I swung around from behind the tree and let the sword come down. The figure slumped to the ground and the lantern rolled over and went out.

"Quick! Follow me down!" I whispered.

WE STARTED running again, stumbling and groping in the darkness, guided only by an occasional shaft of light that came through the trees, knowing only that we were going downhill. The others had seen the lantern go out. I heard their calls increase, and saw the other lanterns converging toward the spot where I had killed the soldier. A moment later they were shouting and screaming the alarm.

At the bottom of the Mount I stopped. We've got to return the Princess to her quarters," I said to Coleridge. "How do we get there?"

"There is no way, save across a guarded bridge," said Kalay.

"Lead us to it," I said.

We moved in a circle, back toward the Khan's palace, keeping to the shadows as much as possible. Soon we saw the moon reflected from the surface of a wide stream. The stone bridge across it was fifty yards away, across an open space. A helmeted soldier stood at either approach. They would see us the minute we stepped into the clearing.

"Wait here," I said.

I took off my coat and put the sword into it, using the length of both sleeves as a scabbard, protecting the blade from the moonlight. Then, holding the coat in front of me, one hand firm on the sword's figured guard, I started walking across the open space toward the bridge. They saw me before I had taken five steps. I kept going at a slow pace, hoping to throw them off guard, and as I had expected, they came together at the center of the bridge, looking toward me and evidently talking.

When I was thirty feet from the bridge, they braced their legs and raised their long pikes. There was sudden death waiting at the end of those fierce points.

"Who approaches the palace of the Khan?" one of them called.

Every foot was precious now. I reached the bridge and stopped. I leaned against the stone wall, saying nothing, standing there quite casually. One of them came toward me and brought the point of his staff a few inches from my chest. I swallowed and remained still.

The second soldier, puzzled, raised his staff so that he could come closer. "Speak!" he demanded. I judged the distances carefully; he was still too far away. I wanted him to come about halfway down the ten foot length of the first pikestaff, so that it would be between him and me when I moved aside, and his pike useless at that short range.

I whispered something he couldn't possibly hear. He came in closer. I moved swiftly to the right, away from the outstretched staff, grabbed it just below the point and yanked. It almost pulled the soldier off his feet. With my right hand I brought the broadsword up in a quick stroke to the soldier who had approached me. It sank

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into his groin. He flopped forward on it. I yanked it out and he fell against his comrade's pikestaff. Two long steps and I was on the other one before he could back up to use his unwieldy weapon. The flat of the blade smashed against his face. He dropped his staff, flew against the side of the bridge and tumbled over into the stream. Before the staff had stopped rattling on the stone, I signalled Coleridge to come on.

We crossed the bridge and kept close to the palace wall, and when we reached one of the entrances to the palace, Coleridge took Kalay in his arms briefly and spoke to her. We watched her run up the marble stairs and disappear from view. He turned to me with wonder in his eyes.

"Not now," I said. "We've still got to get out."

But how would we get out? There was no rope now. There was only one way—back to the south gate, and it would be hopeless for two of us to try that. When we came to the outer battlements I stopped.

"Listen to me," I said. "Don't ask me any questions, just listen. You don't remember me. That's not important now. But you're a poet, aren't you? And you've been speaking lines tonight, lines that will be part of a poem when you return to your own time. Well then, the most important thing is for you to get out now. Do you know anything about getting back to one's own time—about how it's done?"

"YES. Vacameth told me that each returns to his own time when his reason for coming here has been satisfied. When that happens, one leaves here as suddenly as one came."

A stifling fear gripped me. "You mean we can't leave here when we want to—somehow?"

He nodded. "Our conscious volition had as little part on our leaving as it had in our arrival."

"But you've no reason to stay here any more!"

"I have a reason. Kalay."

"And your poem?"

"It is clear in my mind. In my chamber I have a quill and vegetable dyes that Vacameth gave me. When I return there I will be able to write down everything. But why do—"

"Never mind," I cut him short. That must have been the reason he was still here, I thought; maybe the act of writing the lines was it. I stood close to the wall and cupped my hands to form a step. "You're going over the wall," I said. "Promise me that the instant you return to your room you'll write the rest—all of the poem. Before you go to sleep—before you do anything else!"

He couldn't make head or tail of it. Finally he said, "But what will happen to you?"

I wished I could have answered that.

"Over you go," I muttered. He put a foot into my hands and I propelled him high enough to get a grip on the parapet. He clambered up and dropped down out of sight.

Then I stood there foolishly, half expecting to disappear from that moonlit garden; to find myself back in the library stacks . . . and a strange little red volume in my hands. . . . But nothing happened. My reason for coming, then, must have been incomplete, I thought. Maybe it would end for me too when he had written the last lines. I had to make certain! I cursed myself for letting him out of my sight. Maybe he had been caught on the other side. I hadn't heard anything.

There was only one thing to do now: get back to the Court of Time myself. I looked around and got my bearings, then started along the wall for the south gate.

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I don't know what I must have been thinking. There was a reception committee waiting for me at the gate, half a hundred savage little men, armed with pikes, spears, scimitars, and barbarous spiked clubs. They could have annihilated me with one rush but they didn't move. It took me a few seconds to realize why.

It was because it was still *yesterday*. They had known that Coleridge was in the gardens. They didn't know who I was. Even Vacameth didn't know. I was here at least a day before he would know I had come, if things worked out the same way, though I didn't see how they possibly could any more. I was back in that yesterday before they knew about me—any of them, just a big fellow in outlandish clothes, carrying a huge, bloody broadsword cradled in his arms. The other times, somehow, this yesterday had ended abruptly, with Vacameth waiting on the Mount for me to appear. I had changed that, I saw, and this sudden appearance had become an advantage I hadn't counted on, but it didn't last long.

It was Prince Sevasta who thought he had it worked out first.

"This is a trick!" he ground out, furiously, his eyes gleaming yellow from the lanterns, looking at the sword in my arms. He smashed Vacameth across the face with his hand. "Dog!" he cried. "You have lied for the last time! Your fool has taken off the white robe that was his salvation!"

I held my sword ready as several of the soldiers started for me. "Hold!" said Sevasta. "Let no one touch him. Sevasta alone will deal with him."

HIS face taut and his eyes fixed on me, the Prince removed his silks until he stood stripped to the waist, wearing only a short skirt and his golden pointed helmet. From one of the soldiers he took a long, delicately curved scimitar that shone in the moonlight along every sinister ripple that had been hammered into the blade. He swung it once or twice expertly and started for me. Ten feet away he stopped, waiting until I held my sword up, estimating me.

The broadsword had never been intended for skilled personal combat. It was too long, too heavy and unmaneuverable. I might have asked for a blade like Sevasta's, except that this was obviously not a duel but an impending murder. And had he given me the blade, I might have been worse off; I had never even held one before.

Sevasta crouched and sprang forward on cat's feet. The scimitar lashed out. Instinctively I ducked back and pushed the broadsword up. The scimitar clashed against the flat with a harsh ring. Before the sound had died away, Sevasta lunged forward and the air whistled around me. I couldn't see his blade half the time, it was moving so fast. I kept stepping back, using my sword as a shield. It was like playing tennis in a way: my opponent had caught me off guard and he closed in with sharp smashes, and I was safe only so long as I could retreat fast enough to catch each successive blow.

Again and again he lunged, darting to my left, recoiling suddenly to the right, steel clashing against steel. Sevasta's breath came in long gasps, his lips were curling crookedly. All at once I felt something behind me. I had been backed against the outer wall!

Sevasta cried out in delight, his scimitar held ready. I brought a foot up and pressed it against the wall, and as Sevasta sprang toward me, I pushed myself forward, broadsword before me in both hands, meeting his downstroke over my head. I kept ramming in, got a foot behind him, and before he could

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get away, I bulled him off balance. The broadsword came down in a swift arc. He swayed to one side and the sword passed by him. It must have looked to him that the momentum of the stroke would carry me around, leaving my right side open. It was only partly so, because I had anticipated him.

As I swung past him, he darted in on his toes, crouching low and bringing the scimitar in. At the same instant I heaved the broadsword up in a looping curve, utilizing the momentum of the preceding stroke and bringing it down swiftly. Sevasta saw the sword coming when it was a foot over his head. I remember the way his lips hung, and his eyes, half shut, rolled upwards. The edge of the sword caught him on the shoulder and kept going down into his body. When he fell the sword was still moving down. It stopped only when the point sank into the earth, and a dark pool of blood surrounded it. Sevasta's eyes were still open, his hand still held the scimitar.

I looked toward the gate. The soldiers were standing silently. None of them made a move. I picked up my coat, held the broadsword up, and started for the gate. They moved aside when I reached them. I drew the bars and passed through. The path ahead was empty. Far off the white walls of the Court of Time gleamed in the moonlight.

When I entered the corridor, I went directly to the chamber where I had found Coleridge. He was sitting before a window, writing. He saw me as I came in and rose to meet me. I was completely exhausted. I let the sword drop from my hands and picked up the sheet on which he had been writing. It was made of some thin substance, filled with clear, finely written lines.

"Is it done?" I asked.

He was about to answer, but as he looked past, I followed the direction of his gaze. Vacameth had come into the room, and an imperceptible change had come over everything again. The room darkened and I saw that I was wearing the white robe again. Vacameth knew me now.

Softly, he said, "Remember my words. Do you have what you came here for?"

I took the thin sheet and folded it into a little ball.

"It will never be finished," said Vacameth.

I put the tiny ball of paper into my mouth.

"It is finished," I said. "I have what I came for . . ."

I WAS sitting in one of the alcoves at the Dutch Kitchen, alone. A half-empty beer glass stood before me and Harry had come out from behind the bar to bring me some pretzel sticks.

"Everything okay, Ricky?" he said.

"Everything's okay, Harry."

That was the way it happened. I had no recollection of having left the library, of having walked down the hill to this place. There was a stack of books on the seat next to me, the ones I had intended taking home for the week-end. My watch said it was 6:10, approximately half an hour had passed since I last remembered being in the library. I must have left about half an hour before; it would have taken me that much time to get to the Kitchen.

I thought I must have become so absorbed in my work that I had hardly known what I was doing. These odd fragments of thoughts that flitted through my mind . . . I picked up the little red volume of Coleridge's poems and glanced casually through it. *"And drunk the milk of paradise,"* its last line said, just as it always had. Funny

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I should have expected anything else.

But then the glass of beer was trembling in my hand, for I felt a little seed stuck in my teeth. I picked it out . . . it was a tiny bit of raspberry seed. Of course it was; I had had raspberries for lunch.

But all the time I knew better. I was afraid. All the time I sat there I felt that little wad of paper stuck close to my cheek. At last I took it out and held it in my hand. As I opened it, and saw the words written on it in a fine, neat hand . . . the paper slowly vanished before my eyes. Its edges turned grey, and the paper flaked away into a powdery dust, and the dust blew across the maple table and settled to the floor.

I had seen only that there must have been at least two hundred lines there, most of them in blurred, watery green fluid.

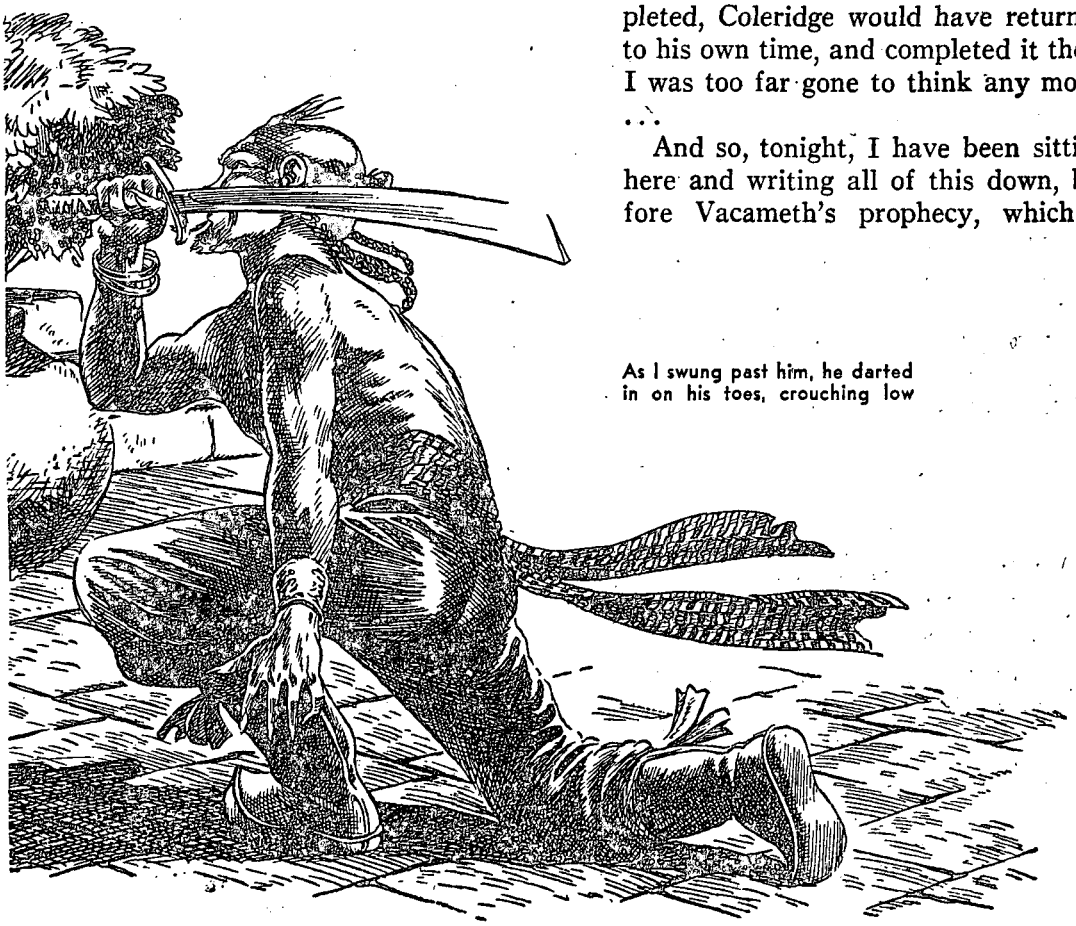
One line I remembered, seeing it the instant the paper disappeared. It was a line toward the bottom of the sheet.

"To tempt the dangerous deep, while total darkness overspreads the skies . . ."

I returned home, shaking as if with a fever. I knew it had all happened, and I began remembering the words of Vacameth the Saracen. When I went to sleep again, waking, this would all be forgotten. But none of it mattered. Nothing mattered but that poem.

Had it been finished? The paper I had brought back had contained a great many new lines. But if it had been completed, Coleridge would have returned to his own time, and completed it then. I was too far gone to think any more. . . .

And so, tonight, I have been sitting here and writing all of this down, before Vacameth's prophecy, which I



As I swung past him, he darted in on his toes, crouching low

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have so far cheated, can come true. I don't know what to do. I feel too tired now.

HERE, Eric's manuscript seemed to come to an end, but there were two more sheets. I lit another cigarette and continued reading. Marshall was hunched over in his chair, waiting for the next sheets.

"It is almost three weeks since I wrote the pages which have preceded this. When I woke up that next morning and found them, they were completely new to me. I had no memory of ever having written them, though they were obviously in my hand, nor did I remember anything in them. From reading them, however, it appeared that Vacameth's prophecy had indeed come true.

"But since then I have been back several times, four or five at least; I can't be sure any more. Each time it seemed to me that it had been the first. I knew of the preceding times only by the evidence of this manuscript. Once I had actually started writing it down again when I found these pages and saw it had been written already.

"Each time has been like the other to the slightest detail, except for one time. I keep returning to that day when I met Coleridge on the pathway, with the soldiers and palace guards charging down on us. It is all the same. Instead of Coleridge being there alone now, lost as a prisoner in time, I am there with him when I come, and we go through the larger cycle. We return to his yesterdays until I think of the new way. Then we go through his meeting with Kalay and our flight, and the duel with Sevasta.

"But I never know I am doing what I have done before. I know that only when I return. Then I find these pages, and these lines that you see at the bottom of this page. Each line represents one of the times that I have returned and found this manuscript, and the tale which is fresh in my mind, already written and waiting for me. If only there was some way I could remember. . . . perhaps I could try to change things again. But it seems impossible. The moment I tell Vacameth that I have what I came for, I return.

"I have gone back to that time from various places, from my own room, from a walk on the campus, and I have returned to find myself having continued whatever I was doing in this time. Once I started to light a cigarette; I had gone through the events of the three days—or was it two—and returned, and less than a second had gone by, for I was just taking the first drag and putting out the match. There is no correspondence in the passage of time. I have been away for as much as two hours, while here I evidently was carrying on.

"It is only this realization of the fact that this has happened a number of times, and which I know only from this manuscript and the lines on it, that enables me to work out a partial solution of what must happen there. It is that Coleridge does not return to his own age in time, because, as Vacameth told him, one returns only when one's reason for having come is satisfied. It seems to me now that Coleridge could not have finished his poem. He never had a chance to answer my question when I asked him about it, because Vacameth came in. Had he answered that the poem was unfinished, I might not have felt ready to leave. But it could not have been finished, or Coleridge too would have left.

"And now I understand Vacameth's fear, for once I returned to the days of the Khan at a time when Coleridge

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had gone. Years must have passed since that day when I met him. The Court of Time was gone. I learned this from a frightened shepherd, who told me that the city of Kanbalu was a hundred miles to the south. He told me that the Court of Time had been destroyed by Kublai because of the murder of a mighty Prince. And, he said, we were standing not far from the spot where the Khan's soldiers had caught an aged Saracen, fleeing from the Court, and put him to death.

"So that is what must have happened. In the end, Vacameth's work was lost because I killed Sevasta that night. Vacameth had good reason to fear the link that bound me to Coleridge; it was the link that he sought and could not find.

"And this too I might be able to change if I could remember having been there when I return. But I cannot remember, and each time I come back, the memory of even this time, which should be fresh and alive, grows dimmer. If I did not have these pages, I might not even know that this had happened at all. I have come to depend upon them.

"THESE last few days I have been talking more openly of this maddening thing that has happened to me. On two different occasions I began telling my class about it. They took it as humor, but the second time I could see that they were beginning to wonder. I have heard that people around the campus are talking about me. I look like a wild man half the time, and sometimes I guess I sound a little incoherent. I've tried to tell Marshall about it, but he says pooh-pooh, and why don't I stop working so hard.

"But it isn't that, Pete. You must believe me. This really happened, and it keeps happening. I know there is a lot I can't explain. Why do I understand all those languages? What happens to that white robe I wear? Why are there never bloodstains on my coat when I return? Why can I never remember what the Princess Kalay looked like? If only that little wad of paper that comes back with me each time, as I think it does, would last long enough for me to show it to someone. What would they think then?

"I have become afraid of it. I know why I keep returning. I am trying to get back to an earlier time than that first time I arrived. I once came there later; maybe this too can happen. But I am afraid of what may happen then, and a fear keeps growing in me that one of these times I may not return at all.

"That is why I have written this and put it into an envelope to be delivered to you if I should disappear. I want you to know what happened. I have lost all perspective. I don't know if this should be made public. I leave it to you.

"I know only that Vacameth's prophecy is coming true, for I am slowly losing all remembrance of that which has become most precious to me . . . the memory of this poem and its completion. One line alone remains . . . *'To tempt the dangerous deep, while total darkness overspreads the skies . . .'*

Your friend,
Eric"

WHEN Marshall had finished the last page, he put them all together and placed them face down on the table. He took his glasses and began to polish them, and after a time he cleared his throat. "Well," he said, "what do you make of it?"

"I don't know."

"You believe it?"

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I shrugged. "Maybe he's gone crazy," I said. "The whole thing gives me the creeps. We ought to find him."

"You have any idea where to look?"

At this point we both heard someone in the empty bedroom. I got up and opened the door, and there was Eric, sitting up in bed and rubbing his eyes. I switched on the lights.

"Damn you!" he yelled. "Turn off those lights!" He peeped out from between his hands and jumped out of bed. "Pete!" he cried, happily, "You old son of a gun! Where the hell have you been keeping yourself? What brings you back to Sleepy Hollow?"

"I got a few days off," I grinned. "Thought I'd see you."

"Swell, just swell! How long you been here? I thought I heard voices out there a few minutes ago."

"Professor Marshall came up with me. We sat outside."

"You should have wakened me, dope." He stuck his head through the doorway. "Hello, Professor. I'll be out as soon as I get a pair of shoes on."

He came out blinking and stretching. "Wow, am I groggy, Pete," he yawned. Then he screwed up his face in surprise and pulled a little wad of paper from his mouth. "What the hell is this?" he said. "Have I taken to chewing paper while I'm asleep?"

He aimed it carelessly at an ashtray. It missed and fell to the floor, and Eric began knotting his tie. But Marshall and I had both turned casually to look at the paper on the floor, and as we looked at it . . . it just disappeared. One minute it was there, the next minute the worn carpet was bare.

"Hey!" Eric cried, pounding my back. "What are you choking on?"

"Guess I swallowed wrong," I mumbled. "Whew!"

"Feel better?"

"Yeah," I said slowly, "better than you look, because you look like hell. You must've lost twenty pounds since Easter."

"Twelve, anyway," he admitted, tucking his shirt in. "Guess I've been working too hard."

"You need a vacation," I said.

"Damned right. Any suggestions?"

Marshall said: "Peter and I are going fishing over the week-end. How about it?"

"Swell," Eric nodded. "Just like old times, huh?"

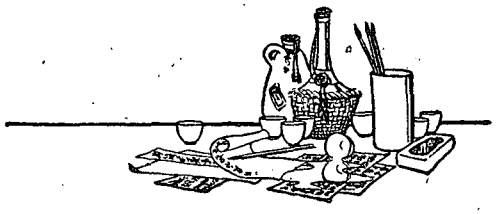
"Uh," I said. "And how about a steak right now?"

When we got out to the street, Marshall handed me the folded sheaf of papers. "Here's your junk back, Peter," he said. "I'm afraid I'll never appreciate the intricacies of viaduct engineering."

"The hell with it," I said, tearing it up and throwing the tiny pieces up in a miniature hail of confetti. "The hell with it!" The wind caught up the scattered bits of paper and blew them along before us.

Eric said: "This was a nice clean town before you got here."

THE END



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The PSYCHIC STIMULUS

By FRANCES YERXA

DREAM-INSPIRATIONS and other manifestations of psychic phenomena, all authentically corroborated, have given rise to some surprisingly satisfying discoveries and inventions. There are few people who have not heard of how the German chemist, Kekule, discovered his famous "benzene ring." He was seeking to determine how the atoms in a molecule of an organic compound were arranged. The problem had been on his mind for a long time. Then, in the middle of the night he had a dream, from which he awoke with the solution to this famous difficulty. He saw, in the dream, exactly how the atoms were arranged—at least symbolically—and he put down the result on paper. What inspired the dream—no one can say, though the skeptic will immediately point out that it was the result of the night and day concentration on the problem. This still does not explain how he happened to hit on the *correct* answer. Who can give it?

Mathematicians have recounted similar phenomena. Out of a clear sky there will suddenly come into their minds the answers to problems that have caused them no end of worry. There is no simple, rational explanation to this. It occurs and that's all there is to it. You may scoff and laugh —but that doesn't explain how the answers are found.

Answers to problems have commonly occurred among engineers too. Even Edison has implied that some power greater than he often suggested methods of attack on certain problems to him. The British physicist, Sir William Crookes, indicated that somehow, strange, psychic interferences aided him. Sir William Crookes went so far as to put this to the test, but he drew no reliable conclusions. The subject seemed to be entirely too elusive. He wrote voluminously on the matter, though.

The Italian engineer and bridge constructor, Sorrelini, tells of how he was aided in some unknown manner. He was an army engineer assigned to bridge construction in Italian Eritrea in North Africa. His problem was to throw a bridge across a mountain chasm to permit a road to be constructed. Because it was necessary to work on a very narrow ledge of a road, he could not see how he could bring up heavy cranes and machinery to enable him to set a steel framework across the gorge. It was impossible to work from both sides of the bridge site because on the opposite side there was even less room to work than on his own. For a month he tried innumerable ways of doing the job. He knew that a cantilever frame of some sort would have to be started from his side of the gorge. But because the heaviest type of beams could not be used he felt that it was impossible to build such a cantilever.

"The problem obsessed me," he said in his own words, "and I tried everything that I could think of—without effect. About a month and a half after I started the project I happened to be dozing in my tent, half ruminating about the difficulty, when I heard a voice. 'Think of the cantilever', it said to me, 'there is the answer.' I jerked into wakefulness, seized a pencil and paper and began toying with the design. Then like a shot in the dark I saw the design before me. The structure was completed in three months. I will never understand the voice as long as I live, though I will hear it clearly again and again."

There you have it: a responsible engineer, telling that he was inspired by a mysterious voice. Fantastic though it may be it happened and we can't dismiss it with a nod or a shrug. If this was an isolated instance perhaps we could, but the same thing has been recorded too often. Science can give no answer to such thigns. Apparently we must look beyond the things of the flesh in order to obtain a suitable explanation. A scientist said: Mind is the most direct thing we have knowledge of—all else is remote inference. He might have added—"and that includes the psychic, too!"

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Make Yourself A Wish

by Geoff St. Reynard

"See here," the young man said emphatically, "I won't settle for less than three wishes!"

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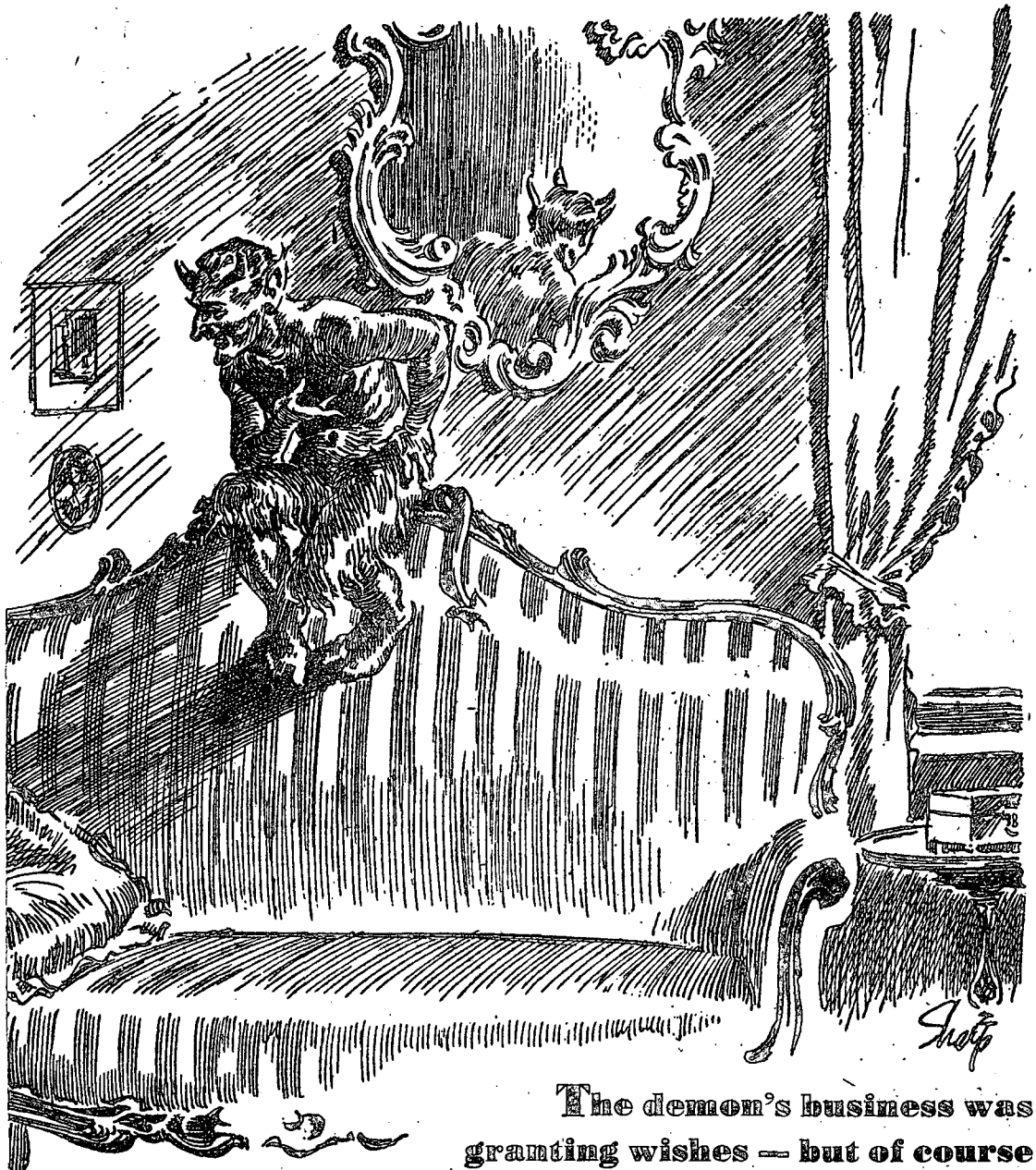

The demon's business was granting wishes — but of course there was a rate of payment . . .

"ONE WISH."

"Three wishes."

"One wish."

"Three wishes."

"One wish."

"Oh, come. Three wishes. It's usual."

"One wish."

"Make it two?"

"One wish."

"Two, damn it. I'll give in one if you will: Two wishes."

"One wish."

"See here," the young man said, crossing his legs comfortably and light-

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ing a cigarette with such exquisite nonchalance that you'd have thought he spoke with demons every day, "see here, you're not dealing with the local peasantry, y'know. I'm from a city as large as any you may have in Hell. I've read up this business. It's tradition, hang it all, you can't get away from that. Three wishes is the usual compensation—if not more! Look at Faust. Anything he wanted for a long lifetime."

"One wish," repeated the brown demon, who was perched on the back of the great Chesterfield.

"You're a bulldog sort of fellow," said the young man equably. "I can see I shan't get any more out of you. I think I'll keep my soul."

Here the demon threw back his head and gave a brisk barking laugh, so that his narrow yellow fangs, very like a cobra's, came into view. "And you look down on the local yokels," he said, though quite inoffensively. "Why, your soul's been pledged to us since that little affair of 1939—"

"Stop that," said the young man with a curse, and a little of his real nature peeped out through the smiling affable mask. "That's enough about '39."

"So I'm simply handing you a favour on a silver platter," went on the brown demon, as though he had never been interrupted. "One wish. Anything at all. Within limits."

"Limits," said the young man, whose name was, prosaically enough, Frank White, "limits, eh?"

"And speaking of limits," continued the demon, looking at his right wrist, on which some odd-looking numerals were scrawled in greenish-yellow phosphorescence, "we've got just about two minutes to end this transaction. What shall it be? Riches beyond the wildest dreams of avarice?"

"Hell, no," said White, grinning broadly. "My uncle left me eight hundred thousand net last year, and my wants are relatively modest."

"Just a little quiet obscurity, eh?" asked the brown demon, flashing his thin fangs. "After the affair of the—"

"Shut up!" cried the man loudly, leaping to his feet. "And I'd tell you to go to hell, but I'm afraid you would. Very well," he said more calmly, seating himself once more. "Let's finish. One wish only, is it? What about the old gag: I wish all my wishes would always come true?"

THE demon made a vulgar motion and a scornful noise, and disdained to answer further.

"Suppose, then, I wished that I'd go to heaven when I came to die?" queried White cleverly.

Again the demon sneered, and objected, "Limits, I mentioned. There are certain obvious limits."

"Suppose you define them."

"Haven't the time now; and if you're thinking of wishing (as I know you are) that no one will ever find out you are Alf—Very well, I won't mention the name, but if you're thinking of wishing that you will always be free from detection, I'll tell you right now that you needn't waste the wish. You're perfectly safe in the matter of—"

"Will you be quiet!" shouted White, glowering down at the brown demon from his great height. He had sprung from his chair like a catamount from its rock.

"We have but one minute now," said the demon casually, glancing at its eldritch wrist-watch.

"Very well," said the young man who called himself Frank White, taking a turn about the large and comfortable living room. "Very well. Very, very well. . . . What about long life? Could you handle that?"

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The eyes of the demon grew speculative as he mused over the items . . .

"We could handle that," assented the demon.

"No, that'd take a lot of the savour out of existence."

"Wise man," said the brown demon, lifting in surprise the things which grew out of its forehead where eyebrows should have been. "Wiser than I'd suspected. Long life would be, in your case, a foolish wish. You may have it anyway, I won't say; but for one of your temperament a touch of uncertainty is better by far."

"There's my wife," said White, stopping abruptly in front of the Chesterfield. "I love her—"

"As much as you're capable of loving anyone besides yourself," put in the demon.

He shrugged the remark aside impatiently. "All right, say I'm fairly comfortable with her; but I get on her nerves. She's too blasted highstrung. She flies off the handle so. It makes existence something less than perfection."

"Now you're skirting the borders of a wise wish," said the brown demon approvingly. "Do go on."

"Suppose I wished—"

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"Yes?" prompted the demon.

"Suppose I wished that she would be perfectly satisfied with everything I did?"

"There, again, you lose the savour," said the demon.

"Right," said the tall young man energetically. "Right. Say four out of every five things I did would please her."

"Inordinately?" asked the demon, scratching laconically at his bare brown chest with the tip of his tail. "Or just mildly?"

"Ordinarily. Let's say she'll be perfectly contented with four out of each five things I do."

"Is that the wish?"

"Yes," he said, making up his mind rapidly, for he knew the time was running short. "Yes, that's the wish."

The brown demon made an indescribable, an incomprehensible movement with his tail and his left arm. "Done," said he, rising and stretching his naked little brown body feline-wise, so that White could see he was barely two feet tall.

"See here," said White suddenly, pursing his lips in thought. "I don't mean literally *everything* I do, you know."

"Of course not," said the demon. "We're reasonable people down below. We'll keep track of the things, and every time one more is ticked off I'll make a small noise, quite a small noise that only you will hear. That way you can keep count, and watch your fifth actions. Naturally, when you do things that have no significance in your relations with her, such as closing a door, or going to sleep, or reading the paper, naturally they won't count. Just the acts which normally might—say irk her a bit."

"That's the diamond-studded catwhisker," said Frank White happily. "That's the precise notion I had. By God," he cried joyously, not noticing how the brown demon winced at the Name, "this should iron the last kinks out of life! This should put it on a basis of damn-near perfection!"

"Quite," said the demon. "Quite, quite. And now I'll be off. Just remember, this hasn't been a bargain. We've got your soul, you know. This has just been a gift for services well and faithfully rendered, in 1939." And before White could swear at him, he had vanished like a strange evil little dream.

"HELLO, dear," said White as his wife came into the front hall, bringing with her a gust of chill wind and a white puff of snow.

"Hello, darling," she said, smiling breathlessly at him. She was a very pretty girl, a tiny creature beside his six-foot-two of lithe muscle; and her hair was chestnut and her green eyes danced. "How are you?"

"Swell. Get all your shopping done?"

"All but the liquor. Oh, double-darn it. I forgot the whiskey."

"I'll go down and get it," he offered. "And while I'm there," he added, on a sudden impulse, "I'll just have four or five quick ones to keep out the chill."

He watched her narrowly without seeming to do so. For the fraction of a second he saw her brows contract, her pert little mouth draw down; then she was all sunny acquiescence.

"Good! It'll be some fun for you after a day of being cooped up indoors. I'll expect you when I see you."

* * *

As he entered the house several hours later, with the dull fire of the whiskey leaping sluggishly in his belly, he saw her look up from the Chesterfield and smile at him, no trace of anger or sorrow on her features; and just at that

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moment he heard the small sound which the brown demon had promised him, and he knew that the first act had been duly recorded. . . . And thinking of how often he would be hearing that small sound, his eyes narrowed and his hand went slowly up to his chin and rubbed it reflectively. For the first time he began to wonder whether or not his bargain—no, his request—had been so very wise as he'd thought.

A sound such as that, which he had certainly heard before but which he could not quite place, would prey on a man's nerves after so long. . . .

He shrugged. He wouldn't listen to it consciously. He had a great faculty for turning off his mind from undesirable noises. He could sit by the radio while his wife's daily serial was on, and hear never a syllable. He should eventually be able to switch off the small sound likewise.

Yet he knew that if he were given one more wish, he would fervently beg never to hear that strange small sound again.

* * *

"I don't like beets," he said.

"I know, darling, but they're so good for you," said his wife.

He picked up the bowl of beets and, taking careful aim, hurled them calmly and calculatingly through the dining-room window. A blast of snow came roaring in through the shattered pane. He looked expectantly at his wife. She was laughing.

"If you feel that strongly, my sweet," she chuckled, "you'll never even smell a beet in the house again!" She trotted over to the extension phone to call the local hardware store, the proprietor of which replaced broken windows for a nominal fee; and Frank White sat back in his chair and was starting a large grin when he heard again the old little sound that was made in Hell for his ears alone . . . and he shut off the grin, and frowned instead.

IF YOU stretch your imagination to the snapping point, he thought, it could all be an hallucination. I could have dreamt the brown demon. She might have decided that I looked like a man who could use a good stiff drink. She could be in a marvelous mood, and realize that my hatred for beets must be something phenomenal to make me toss a bowl through the window. It could all be an astounding coincidence. Life might just be puttering along in its usual fashion, except for the small sound that ticks off the actions, the small sound from far below which I cannot switch off, which I cannot ignore, which I must somehow learn to live with.

By the Lord Harry, he thought, I'll give it a real test!

The chap from the hardware store was youngish, perhaps thirty-six or -seven. He was about five feet eleven, and looked husky enough. If there was one thing Mrs. White would never countenance in her own home and her right mind, it would be a fist fight, a brawl fit only for some low tavern.

Frank White, six-two of beautifully conditioned muscle and sinew, stepped into the path of the fellow, who looked up at him mildly. He was just leaving.

"I don't like your fee," said White, and sank his left fist into the fellow's midriff. "It's too damned high," he grunted, and slashed a right cross that threw his astounded, doubled-up opponent into a delicate table loaded with vases and vinery. And then he stood back and waited, smiling, as the hardware man picked himself up and came crouching toward him over the broken wreckage.

While it lasted it was a pretty de-

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cent scuffle, and when it was over and done White slipped the amazed fellow a handful of twenties and shoved him out the front door with some fantastic, cock-and-bull, trumped-up whispered yarn of impressing his wife, to whom he then turned. She came into his arms, her green eyes suffused with tears.

"He's scratched your poor cheek! But oh, Frank, you showed him!" She stared up at him, smiling in a watery fashion. "You beat the devil out of him, didn't you, darling?"

And somewhere down in the center of the spinning globe, the brown demon made that strange small noise which was especially for Frank White's ears.

HE SAT on the Chesterfield and lit a cigar, wondering if this would count. His wife generally made no objection to his smoking, so long as he was careful with the ashes; and even as he had expected and hoped, there was no unearthly little noise as the match flared and the first fragrant clouds went rolling out into the room. He looked around critically. One to go before he had any opposition, one more act before he must needs watch his step. Already he had in mind the fifth action, yet the fourth was not fully decided upon. It would be a relief, in a few moments, to hear an angry protest, or perhaps a groan of resignation, or even a whimper of anguish, after all this honey and cream. He looked about him.

There was the oil painting, dubiously Rembrandtish; the little shelf of trinkets and knickknacks dating from his wife's college years (some day he'd smash them one by one, but no sense in pushing his streak of gorgeous luck just yet); the great solid bronze bust of Napoleon—he liked that, had bought it personally, he rather fancied himself as being somewhat Napoleonic; the huge tank which held Elmer.

Elmer!

That torpid, overgrown goldfish! That monster carp! That stupid, egotistical, scaly Behemoth among goldfishes, whom his wife fed lovingly every day with great slabs of horrid whitish stuff that positively turned his stomach to see! Elmer!

He leaned over and, placing his fingertips carefully on the side of the aquarium, heaved. The expensive Persian carpet was suddenly a mass of seaweed, broken glass, snails, and rushing water. In the midst of it all flopped the unwieldy golden bulk of Elmer, his foolish mouth agape with slow-blooded fishy surprise. Flop, flop, flop.

"Well, thank the powers we won't have to look at that monstrosity any longer," said the cheery voice of Mrs. Frank White, almost but not quite drowning out the small noise with which the demon ticked off this piscine slaughter.

The young man leaned back and laughed joyously, uproariously. It was all so frightfully perfect. It was all such an everlasting lark. It was all such good clean fun. For the remainder of his life he could do anything he pleased.

Still laughing, he put out the hand which held the cigar, the fat imported two-dollar cigar, and casually tapped it, so that the inch-long grey ash fell on the Persian rug. His carefully-thought-out fifth action.

THE small sound—not so small this time—exploded in his skull, and he recalled abruptly where he had heard it before. It was the sharp, barking laugh of the naked brown demon.

He glanced toward his wife, and his casual look was riveted upon her. She was standing, her little hands held tense before her like curving claws,

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her hair positively flying up from her head, her green eyes blazing wrath.

"You filthy swine!" she screamed, advancing slowly like some miniature Joan of Arc starting on a crusade against the powers of darkness. "You foul, dirty, contemptible hound! How often have I begged you on my knees not to spill your vile ashes on my clean carpet!"

His mouth dropped open in amazement. He gestured weakly, helplessly, toward the disgusting mess of the smashed aquarium, and then at the infinitesimal smudge of grey ash.

"But—but—but—" he stammered.

"You think all I have to do is clean up after you, you hog!" she cried hysterically, still coming slowly toward him. "You selfish beast! I'll show you. I'll teach you not to make my home a shambles! Scattering your stinking ashes—" Her wildly roving eyes lit on the outsize bronze bust of Napoleon, cocked hat ridiculously aslant over his frowning brow.

"I'll show you!" she shrieked again, and grasping the statue raised it above her head. White was so far gone in surprise that he could do nothing but wonder how her slight arms could lift such a tremendous weight.

Her slim lovely body, twitching with the fury of her violent verbal attack, towered over him as he sat paralyzed on the Chesterfield. In a white flash of understanding he knew she meant to kill him, and he could not move a muscle. In his ears, a running undercurrent of horrid accompaniment to her screaming, he heard the laughter of the brown demon, not brisk and short now, but rolling and full of the hideous merriment of the everlasting pit.

Staring hopelessly at his wife as the great bronze bust came hurtling down, he saw behind her wide green eyes the leaping tireless flames of Hell that waited to devour him.

THE END

FAIRY TALES

by JON BARRY

THE belief in fairies, which forms so great a part of the old folklore of Western Europe, is found among the American races. The Ojibbeways see thousands of fairies dancing in a sunbeam, and during a rain millions of them hide in flowers. When disturbed, they hide underground. They have their dances the same as the Irish fairies, and also kill the domestic animals of those who offend them. The Dakotas also believe in fairies. The Otoes say the little people live in a mound at the mouth of Whitestone River. They are eighteen inches high, with large heads. They are armed with bows and arrows, and kill all those who approach their residence.

The Shoshones say that the mountains of Montana are full of imps, called Nirumbees, two feet long, naked and with a tail. They steal Indian children, and leave in their place young of their own shameful race. They resemble the stolen young so much that the mothers often mistake them as their own and nurse them, which causes the mother to die.

REDHEADED LUCK

by PETE BOGG

RED HAIR was very unpopular among the ancient Egyptians, and Greeks and Romans. According to ancient history, red hair was banned in many nations. The Egyptians thought it was unlucky for the country to have redheads, so they went through the land each year, and gathered all the redheads in one town. There they held the annual ceremony of burning the maidens alive who were unfortunate enough to have red hair. The idea was that by doing away with them, the country could eventually be rid of all brilliant tresses.

But in New Zealand, red is a sacred color, and any woman with red hair is thought to have a clear road to heaven. The Irish love red hair and believe that it brings them luck. But in Spain, they frown upon redheads because they believed that the traitor, Judas Iscariot, had red hair. Nearly all the women in history that lost their heads, were red-headed. Some people believed red hair was a sign of witchery, and many were burned at the stake for this "crime."

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SPIRIT of the KEYS

by Chester S. Geier

The Spirit Of Creation took pity on Tom Kirby and brought him the woman of his dreams — and also a typewriter . . .

KIRBY heard the rhythmic clatter of a typewriter as he walked down the hall toward his apartment door. He paused with his hand on the knob and listened, smiling, forgetting the anxiety that lay like a dark weight over his mind.

It was his typewriter, of course. And the sound it was making meant Elaine was using it. She would be writing a note as she often did when he was out. She would leave it in the cylinder for him to read when he sat down to resume work. He knew it would seem a silly note to an outsider, yet there would be a significance in it for him—a significance and a wonder, the thought of which, even now, brought an aching tightness to his throat.

He could picture her before the machine, her small face a study in concentration, her slim fingers flashing nimbly over the keys. Her dark hair would be tumbled over her forehead, her gray eyes would be bright, and her red lips would be curved in a smile half mischievous and half tender. There would probably be a smear of flour over her pert nose.

She had evidently just returned from her job at the insurance office, where she worked as a typist. Her hat, coat, and purse would be scattered about the room. Supper would be cooking on the tiny stove in the even tinier kitchenette, and the table would be set for two. He could envision these details with the vividness of one for whom two months of married life still holds many novelties.

Sudden pain touched Kirby. Pain that Elaine had to work at all, pain that the queer slump in his own work made it necessary. He didn't know what was wrong, but it had become difficult to write. Not so long ago, he had been turning out stories with almost ridiculous ease. But now, when production counted most, his creative energies seemed to have deserted him.

He knew that worrying over the situation had made it worse. He had lost his touch, become confused and uncertain. Such few stories that he managed doggedly and laboriously to force out on to paper met with rejections. Even the typewriter on which he worked seemed to have turned against him. It had become unresponsive, strangely awkward to use.

During the last few weeks his difficulties had grown to such proportions that there were times when he found it impossible to remain before the typewriter at all. Today had been one such time. In despair, he had gone for a walk, hoping that exercise would ease the growing strain within him. Only the

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The keys of the typewriter seemed to be alive as they started clicking madly across the paper

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thought of what Elaine would have said had prevented him from getting thoroughly drunk.

BEYOND the door the typewriter was still clattering. Kirby straightened his shoulders and forced the bitterness from his face. Elaine was probably aware of his torment, but he wanted to spare her the full impact. He let himself into the apartment, walking toward the corner of the living room where he had his desk.

He stopped. It was as if a wall had shot up before him.

The typewriter was on the desk. It was a late model, streamlined and sleek, and it was clattering away briskly, the keys jerking up and down, the type bars rising and falling in a swift blur. A sheet of paper was rolled into the cylinder, already half-filled with typed words.

But Elaine was not seated at the desk. There was no one at the desk. Except for himself, the apartment was empty.

Kirby stared, his spare face a wildly twisted mask. The machine was being used. That was apparent. Yet nobody was in evidence who might be doing so.

He stood there for a long time, watching the impossible from wide, disbelieving eyes. Finally, walking as though in a trance, he went to the desk. He bent slowly to read the neat, single-spaced lines that covered the sheet in the machine.

As he read, there was a final clatter of keys and type bars, and the machine became silent. Its message had been completed.

When Kirby reached the end of the note, he slumped dazedly into the chair before the desk. His face was pale and blank with shock. His eyes were fixed and glassy. In his mind wild thoughts were churning with the turbulence of a maelstrom.

Only one fact stood out clearly. Elaine was gone. And if the note was to be believed—the note which, to all intents and purposes, had typed itself—he would never see her again.

It was a scant four months ago that a knock on the door had first brought Elaine into his life. He had been working on a story, then—one of the first of those stories which had become so oddly difficult to write. He had been annoyed as he had gone to answer the door. With the story troubling him, he had been in no mood for visitors. But his annoyance had vanished swiftly when he saw Elaine standing in the hall.

Even at that first glimpse, something about her caught at him with an instant appeal. She was so much like the girls he described in his stories, slim and fine, with eyes that were clear and direct, and small, regular features that spoke of intelligence and sweetness. It was almost actually as though he had known her always, but was meeting her for the first time only now.

She was dressed in a simple gray suit, with a tiny flowered hat perched saucily atop her dark curls. Her makeup was applied carefully and sparingly, just enough to emphasize the natural piquancy of her features. The total effect was one of freshness and fashionable chic, with the subtly unobtrusive note that marks real taste.

She smiled slightly, a shy, uncertain smile. "Are you Thomas Kirby?"

"Why, yes." Her voice, he noted, was low, with a faintly husky quality. Somehow he had sensed it would be that way, even before she spoke.

"I'm a fan of yours, Mr. Kirby. I never miss any of your stories. I . . . well, I happened to be in the neighborhood, and thought I'd drop in. I hope you don't mind. My name is Elaine Underwood."

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Kirby gasped and stared. *"Elaine Underwood!"*

Her gray eyes became puzzled. "Is anything wrong?"

"No—not exactly. It's just a remarkable coincidence. You see, I'm the sort of person who likes to name things. I've named my typewriter Elaine—and it's an Underwood."

IT WAS the girl's turn to stare. Then she tilted her small chin and laughed. "That certainly is a coincidence. I hope the typewriter is a nice one."

"It is," Kirby assured her. "It's practically new—you know, the streamlined kind." He finished in sudden embarrassment as he realized that the human Elaine Underwood was very much streamlined herself.

The girl laughed again, and after a moment Kirby grinned with her. The note of easy humor served to weaken the barrier of restraint between them. Belatedly remembering his duties as host, Kirby saw Elaine settled into a chair, and then began with guilty haste to gather up the discarded garments which he had flung carelessly about the room. He was painfully aware that Elaine was watching in amusement.

"You'll have to excuse the way I keep the apartment," he said. "I've heard most bachelors are neat, but I'm not one of them."

"That's quite all right," Elaine said.

Finally Kirby sat down in a chair nearby. He offered the girl cigarettes, which she refused. It developed that she did not drink either. His liking for her—already of serious proportions—increased. She was a charming contrast to the glittering, sophisticated girls he knew.

They talked. Elaine spoke of Kirby's stories, which he modestly insisted were only fair. At one point the typewriter was mentioned again, and they exclaimed anew over the coincidence that its name should be so exactly identical to Elaine's. Kirby relaxed, realizing with a touch of surprise that he was enjoying himself tremendously.

He found himself telling Elaine of his background. He had attended college for a couple of years, but had dropped out when the conviction grew upon him that literary craftsmanship would be best achieved through his own efforts. He had worked for an advertising agency and had done considerable writing for radio. In between he had managed to turn out a steady stream of fiction, which he had finally managed to sell. He had turned to freelancing then, his ambition.

Elaine smiled ruefully. "I wish I had as much to say about myself, but the truth is that I'm just starting to test my wings." She went on to explain that she had been in the city only a short time. She had left the small town where she had grown up after the death of an aunt with whom she had been living. She had no other close relatives. At present, she confided, she was working as a typist in an insurance office. She was living at a hotel, but was looking for a small, furnished apartment. It was her search for this that had brought her into Kirby's neighborhood.

"I'm glad you decided to pay me a visit," Kirby said. An instant later he realized that his tone had been much too enthusiastic, for the gray eyes dropped. He added hastily, "It's always a pleasure to meet people who claim to be fans of mine. I haven't gotten over it yet."

Elaine smiled and rose. "I think I've taken up enough of your time, Mr. Kirby. I'm sure you must be very busy."

"Oh, no! Not today." Kirby rose, too, trying frantically to think of some

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excuse which would keep her from leaving him too soon. He glanced at his watch. "In fact, I was just going out to supper. I'd be delighted to have you along."

Elaine hesitated a moment, then accepted. Kirby excused himself to change into more presentable clothes. Knotting his tie before the mirror in the bedroom, he stared wonderingly at his reflection.

"Know what's happened, you poor hack?" he whispered. "You're in love, that's what! You're in love!"

Kirby chose a small, quiet restaurant where the lights were soft and the food definitely better than average. He didn't remember what he ordered. He hardly knew that he ate at all. He was conscious only of Elaine.

HER low, faintly husky voice fascinated him. He found the play of expression across her small features entrancing. He noted that she spoke simply and quietly, her mood ranging from seriousness to bubbling humor. And he was delighted to learn that they liked the same foods, the same books and movies, and that they shared even the same political views.

It struck Kirby suddenly that the number of coincidences surrounding Elaine Underwood verged on nothing less than the miraculous. But then she laughed over some remark she had made, and suspicion left him in a fresh wave of wonder.

When at last they strode from the restaurant, Kirby was still reluctant to have Elaine leave. "The evening's still young," he said. "What do you say to taking in a movie?"

Elaine shook her head slowly. "You've already been very kind. I wouldn't like to take up any more of your time."

"You haven't been taking up my time," Kirby protested. "Why, I haven't enjoyed myself so much in years."

Elaine shook her head again, regretfully. "I really must go."

". . . Well—look. Can I take you to your hotel? And will you let me see you again?"

"Yes." She smiled suddenly and touched his arm. "I—I had been hoping you would ask."

He saw her with increasing frequency after that. And two months after the day he had met her, they were married.

The fact that Kirby already had an apartment left them with no housing problem. Elaine began at once to make the improvements which spelled all the difference between home and merely a place to live. She did much scrubbing and polishing and rearranging of furniture. She performed little miracles with paint and gay fabrics and cleverly placed knick-knacks. To Kirby the total result was breath-taking. His awe of Elaine grew, for she had proved to be an excellent cook as well. If it weren't for the difficulties he was beginning to have with his writing, he would have considered his new existence completely perfect.

At first Kirby had wanted Elaine to quit her job, but she had quickly asserted her more practical nature. She had been aware even then of his writing troubles, and she had insisted on working until he overcame them.

"Besides," she had added, "I'd soon get in your hair if you had me around every day."

Kirby's denial had been quick and vehement. "If you ever got in my hair, it would be from *not* having you around."

It had been impossible to argue with Elaine. She had kept her job, and Kirby had settled down to tackle the complications that had so strangely

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Somehow, Kirby knew, Elaine's life and that of the typewriter were one . . .

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crept into his own work.

He had failed. Two months had passed, and his efforts to fight free had only left him more hopelessly entangled. He couldn't understand what had happened to him. He knew only that he had become unable to write. And somehow he felt that his typewriter was involved. He couldn't have explained why, except that it seemed the machine had become queerly difficult to operate, making it impossible for him to set down his thoughts quickly and in logical order.

Through it all, Elaine had been understanding and kind. She had even seemed to feel that she was to blame for Kirby's stalemate. Kirby had denied it vigorously, but he knew he hadn't convinced her. Tormented by his incompetence, worried about Elaine, seeing the money he had managed to save dwindle to the vanishing point, Kirby had felt the situation building up to the pitch of an explosion.

He hadn't been wrong. The explosion had come. Even more disastrously than he had expected.

SEATED now before the desk, Kirby glanced at the sheet of paper in his hand. He read it again, hoping against futile hope that his eyes had somehow betrayed him the first time.

"Dear Tom: When I came home this evening and found that you were still unable to work, I realized that I couldn't keep up the pretense any longer. In the two months that have passed, I've watched your suffering grow steadily worse. I just couldn't bear it any more. For your happiness and mine, it's best that I . . . go back.

"It's all my fault, Tom dearest. I had been warned that this would happen. *He*—you might call him the Spirit of Creation, to give Him a name—told me I wouldn't be good for you. Not in this . . . aspect.

"It's so difficult to explain, Tom. I just haven't your cleverness with words. But I'll try, knowing how utterly impossible and fantastic it will seem. You see, Tom, *everything* possesses what has been called a soul. Everything. Man is not the only creation favored in this respect. Anything that is created is automatically given a soul. This means that the things created by Man himself also have souls. For energy is expended in the process of creation. This energy remains a part of the thing created, and becomes its soul.

"A typewriter, Tom, has a soul. It is not simply a lifeless object. It takes on life from the life which created it, and lives on through the life of the life using it. There is actually much more in the affection of a craftsman for the tools of his trade than is generally suspected.

"I, Tom dearest, am not only the aspect you knew as Elaine, the girl who became your wife. I am also your typewriter.

"Yes, Tom, incredible as it may seem—your typewriter. I fell in love with you. So madly in love that I was no longer satisfied to serve you as a machine. I grew unhappy. If I couldn't be near you in the human aspect, existence would have become meaningless, a torture.

"The Spirit of Creation took pity on me. He offered to help, though he warned me of the consequences. But I was willing to risk anything. So he gave me a new aspect—the human aspect you knew as Elaine Underwood. You must realize now that my name was no coincidence. I was an Underwood typewriter—and you named me Elaine.

"But with my soul gone from the machine, you could no longer write. The reason is that I was no longer co-operat-

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ing with you. To all intents and purposes, the typewriter had . . . died. This is the explanation why a man cannot work on one machine, though he can work on another of an exactly identical type.

"I could see that you were growing increasingly more worried and miserable, Tom. I was afraid that something terrible would happen. There was only one solution. I had to return to my old aspect.

"So I am still with you. Here, on your desk. It is the only way I can help. So write, Tom, and I'll be working with you. Together we'll turn out that best-seller yet.

Elaine."

Kirby looked up from the note. His eyes settled upon the typewriter. On a sudden, wild impulse his hands shot out and closed about the smooth metal frame. He shook the machine as one might have shaken human shoulders.

"Elaine!" he cried. "Come back! Come back!"

There was no answer. The typewriter remained as silent as it had been since completing the note.

Kirby's hands fell away. He stared at them, surprised and puzzled by his action. He brushed a hand dazedly across his face. He told himself it was all a mad dream. Elaine had been real—as real as any girl he had ever known. And a typewriter was just a machine, a thing of springs and cogs, of keys and rubber rollers. A typewriter had no life—no soul.

Yet . . . yet a typewriter can't operate by itself, and he had seen the machine typing the note—typing with no one at the keyboard. He recalled it too vividly to decide that his eyes had somehow been tricked.

And there was the uncanny similarity of names between the human and mechanical Elaine Underwoods. Too great a similarity for mere coincidence. Suddenly Kirby remembered that Elaine—the human Elaine—had been very much like the girls in his stories. She had looked the same, dressed the same, thought and spoke the same. Here, too, was a similarity too great for mere coincidence.

The mechanical Elaine would have known his preferences, of course. She would have wanted her human aspect to appear as nearly as possible like the girls Kirby described in his stories.

KIRBY rose and began pacing the floor. It was no mad dream, then. Incredible and fantastic as it seemed, the note described things which had actually happened. He had to believe. For Elaine hadn't returned home. Elaine was gone. He would be able to write again—but the only aspect of Elaine that he wanted was gone.

He wondered suddenly. Elaine was gone—but was she gone irretrievably, beyond hope? Wasn't there some way he could bring her back?

He searched his mind desperately. He paced and smoked, lighting one cigarette from the stub of the last. He could think of no solution, though something that might have been the answer danced with mocking elusiveness in a far corner of his mind.

Finally, in utter despair, he picked up the note and read it again. He smiled in abrupt triumph as his eyes came to a line whose significance had escaped him the first two times. He knew now the elusive something that had been in his mind. It was something that would bring Elaine back to him—if it worked.

He glanced at his watch. He saw with relief that it wasn't too late. There was still time to put his plan into action.

He hurried from the apartment. Outside he caught a cab and snapped an

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address at the driver. His destination was a shop where he would be remembered from his last purchase. He didn't have enough money with him for the one he intended to make now, but he felt certain that a down-payment would be sufficient.

It was. The owner of the shop had not forgotten Kirby.

A short time later, with his purchase resting on his knees, Kirby was in another cab, on his way back to the apartment. His pulses raced with excitement. Yet he felt a cold undercurrent of dread. He couldn't overlook the possibility that his idea might be wrong. It was the only hope he had left, and he told himself desperately that it had to work.

Immediately upon reaching the apartment, Kirby placed his purchase upon the desk and removed the cover. At a casual glance, it was hard to tell the two typewriters apart. Kirby touched the newest one and spoke slowly, gravely.

"I name you Elmer—Elmer Underwood. I'm going to learn to work with you, and you're going to learn to work with me. We're going to be good friends. Together we'll write a lot of stories. Good stories. And after a while we'll write a bestseller. Do you hear me, Elmer?"

The carriage moved. It might have been the result of Kirby's fingers slipping to touch the space bar, but he took it as an answer.

He turned to the other machine—the machine that was Elaine's mechanical aspect—and he spoke again, his voice now soft and urgent.

"Elaine, you're free. Do you understand? You don't have to serve me as a machine any more. You can be with me as you were . . . as you always wanted to be."

He watched the door and waited, cold tendrils of uncertainty writhing in his mind. In her note Elaine had written that lack of co-operation—of soul—was the reason why a man couldn't work on one machine, though he could work on another of an exactly identical type. This had given him the idea of buying another typewriter—a typewriter that would co-operate with him—thus making it possible for Elaine to return to her human aspect. But he wasn't sure he would succeed.

He waited. . . .

It wasn't until he heard the clatter of high heels in the hall, it wasn't until he heard the click of a key in the lock, and it wasn't until Elaine ran sobbing across the room and into his arms, that Kirby knew his plan had worked. He held her tightly, his happiness wet on his face, and she was as firm and warm and real as the human Elaine he had always known.

THE END

IMAGINATION?

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

"I SEE him all the time," Mrs. Phyllis Wentworth was fond of telling her friends, "and I don't care what the neighbors say. Uncle Clarence always liked me, anyhow, ever since I was a little girl. It's only natural that he should try to see me now."

But Mrs. Wentworth was almost seventy years old, and her friends and neighbors were inclined to excuse her one eccentricity on the grounds that she lived alone on a pension and had very little else to do but imagine things. The *Cleveland Journal* which reported all this, took the usual, wisecracking, smart-alecky attitude as was to be expected of a newspaper.

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Mrs. Wentworth's husband had died in 1930 but in spite of the conditions then had left her with a more than comfortable pension, a source of income which completely satisfied her simple needs. He had been a railroad man and totally disinterested in psychic phenomena. But his wife was always talking of her Uncle Clarence whom she was very fond of as a little girl. A private investigator of this little incident reported that she evidently obtained her interest in unusual "spiritual" things from her uncle who had been a minor clerk in a small Cleveland bank. In spite of the fact that Mrs. Wentworth and her husband had lived all of their lives within a car-ride distance of her Uncle Clarence (Clarence William Thorn), they never visited but instead carried on a voluminous correspondence. This correspondence was also examined, but it produced nothing but a wealth of discussion on the possibility of life after death, etc. Both Mrs. Wentworth and Clarence Thorn believed implicitly in that "after-existence."

After the death of her husband, Mrs. Wentworth continued to live in her small home, very comfortably, and to visit with her few friends (most of whom she used as sounding-boards for her theories). She also wrote regularly to Mr. Thorn about the usual things, until his death in 1935. Apparently his death did not particularly affect her for she lost none of her interest in those matters near to her. But as time went on her friends noted her increasing preoccupation with what they called spiritualism. Above all, her main topic of conversation was "Uncle Clarence." She affirmed a thousand times that she was in continual expectation of seeing him, that he would appear to her eventually in some guise.

Most of this information was gleamed from Miss Helen Wilson, an old friend of Mrs. Wentworth and similarly interested in things of the spirit. The incident was brought to the attention of the public by a little item in the Cleveland papers which reported simply "that a Mrs. Wentworth, elderly recluse and widow, was found dead in her home on Lawrence street last Friday evening."

In more detail the facts are these: Mrs. Wentworth's neighbors noticed that she had not appeared on her porch in the evening as was her usual custom, and assuming that something was wrong, they investigated. They found her lying in the chair she was accustomed to using in her living room—dead. Her face bore a shocked expression as if she had seen something startling. The room was undisturbed except for one thing. A photograph of Mr. Thorn was laying on the floor where it had fallen from the wall. The coroner upon examining Mrs. Wentworth said that death was simply due to heart failure. Not having a regular physician, it was not known whether she had been subject to heart attacks. Her friends could furnish no information on this point. Thus, the matter was closed. Miss

Helen Wilson in talking to one of the routine reporters sent to any inquest firmly maintained that Mrs. Wentworth's death was caused by the simple shock of seeing Mr. Thorn, her "Uncle Clarence." The matter of the fallen photograph was disregarded. Miss Wilson when questioned about this replied that she had never noticed the photograph and that "it had nothing to do with my friend's death anyway."

The reporter constructed a hypothesis, probably for want of something to do, to this effect: Mrs. Wentworth entered her living room, her mind undoubtedly wrapped up in thoughts of death and Uncle Clarence. Her vision was none too good at her age, of course, and in glancing at the wall, she spotted the photograph. Her mind a complete fog, for an instant, she failed to recognize it for what it was—an ordinary photograph—and she assumed that she was seeing a visitor "not of this Earth." The shock so moved her, in spite of her expectation, that she died then and there of heart failure. This explanation was accepted as very logical by Mrs. Wentworth's friends and neighbors and the matter was completely closed. The reporter had done an excellent job.

There are those of us, however, who would like to ask just a few simple, uncomplicated questions. First, is it not conceivable that she might have seen Uncle Clarence? Second, why was the picture of the man lying on the floor? Third, didn't Mrs. Wentworth have a sound heart? But the so-called "rational" thinkers always neglect these little things.

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Flinch enjoyed the excitement of the situation as he tipped the decanter of hot tea and watched the steaming liquid form a pool on the lady's lap

Astral

by Bernie Kamins

EMORY FLINCH lay in bed and wondered why he was 30 years old and only making $18.50 a week. He wondered why Lady Luck had passed him by, why he hadn't a rich uncle who could die and leave him a fortune, why Old Man Hirshberg, his boss, didn't tap him on the shoulder and says, "Flinch, you've been an office boy here for eight years now. You've done good work. I'm promoting you to general manager of the office and raising your pay to $65.00 a week!"

But Old Hirshberg would never do

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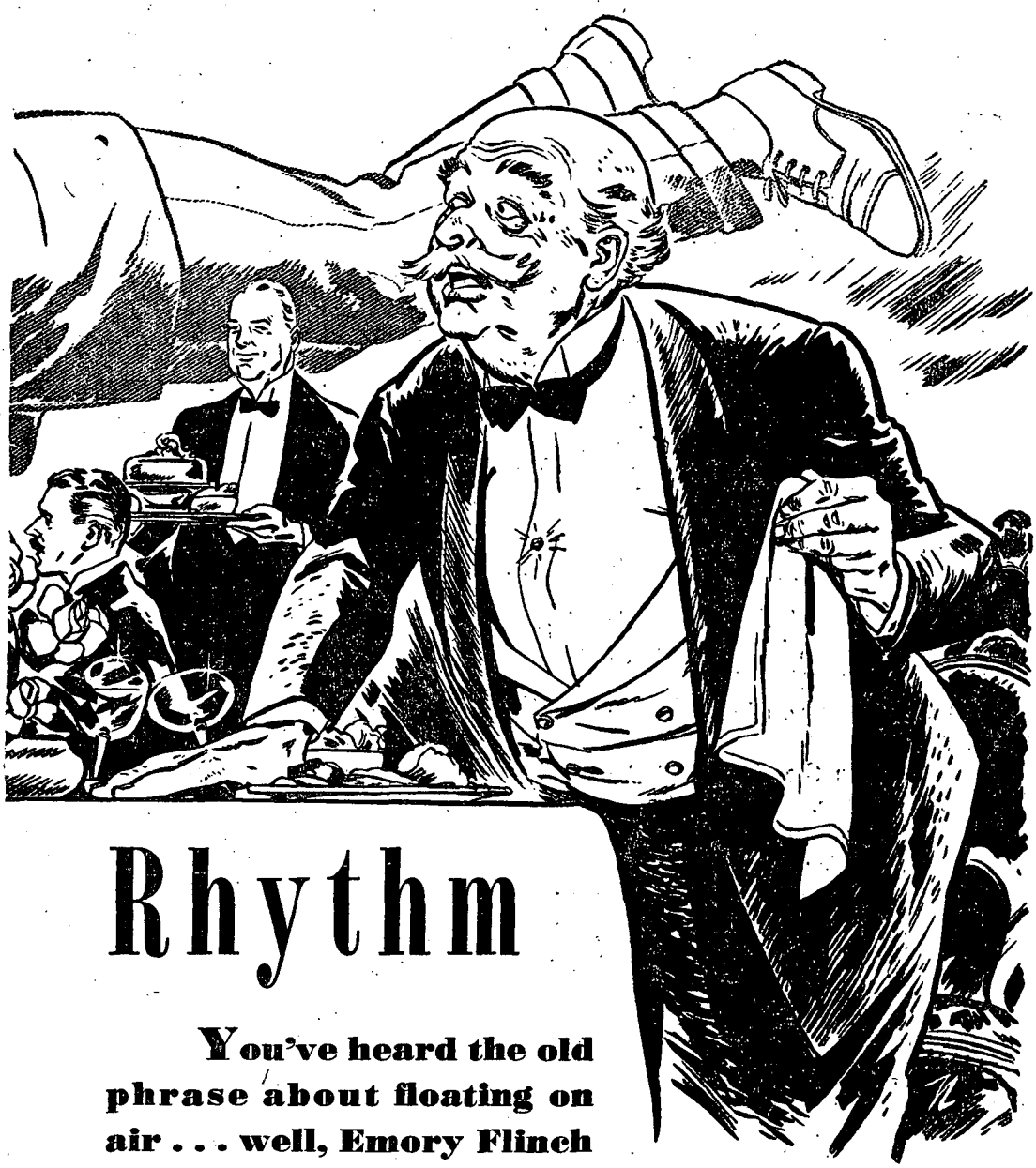

Rhythm

You've heard the old phrase about floating on air . . . well, Emory Flinch heard it — and then did it

that.

Lying on his back in a furnished room, Emory stared at the white ceiling, lighted by the street-lamp on the busy street outside, and thought of his own childhood.

At the moment, childhood seemed unreal, like the shadows on the ceiling caused by the passing of automobiles in the street. Flinch remembered how he used to lie in bed, imagining he could fly. He saw the ceiling growing more distant and told himself he was falling asleep. As a dreamy youngster,

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he often imagined just this—floating up, up, up to the ceiling facing him. The idea was, of course, absurd but so pleasant that Emory allowed his adult mind to be subdued. He succumbed to the wishful thinking, carried himself as stiff as a mummy around the upper regions of his room.

Emory discovered that he didn't have to keep his body tense and rigid while floating. He loosened his muscles and began to enjoy the experience.

He found he could will himself from one corner of the room to the other. For a while, he contented himself with floating at random. Then he eased himself toward the window and looked down upon the street scene. He felt like a being from another planet. An overpowering sense of superiority over the late stragglers filled him with a sort of awful gladness. As he lay in mid-air by the window, he wished he could retain the confident feeling for his waking moments. Because, of course, this was a dream . . .

Emory awoke to the ticking of the clock on his bureau. Eleven o'clock Sunday morning. That was two hours longer than usual for Emory to sleep and yet somehow he didn't feel refreshed at all. As a matter of fact, he told himself, he felt rather tired. Just as well he overslept, thought Emory, Sunday meant church. It was embarrassing to sit there and not make a small donation when the little box came by.

Making a donation meant no date. The thing was very simple. If he went to church, he'd have to donate and the money he'd donate would just allow him enough money left not to be able to take Virginia to the movies that night.

Remembering Virginia brought Emory to life. He shaved very carefully, took his time about choosing a tie from behind the closet door, and dressed inch by inch, reminding himself of a trapper making preparations for the big catch.

As "catch" went through Flinch's mind, he punned to himself, "There's always a catch. Virginia will never marry me on $18.50 per."

The picture of "Big Boy" Miller presented itself as Emory combed his hair for his double's benefit in the mirror. Miller was the biggest "catch" of all. As Emory's rival, he made Emory's wooing of Virginia a simple thing, too, too simple. Miller laughed it off. Well-built, so that Emory not only looked but felt like a pee-wee next to him, "Big Boy" was a muscle-man addict. He worked as a draftsman in the same office as Emory but attended gym classes at the "Y" on Monday nights. On those nights, he left a clear field to Emory and Emory made the most of it.

EMORY thought of his strange dream the night before. If only he possessed some such odd power! If he were somehow as free as the wind, an unseen force, he'd show that big bulk of an excuse for a human being!

Sunday was a problem, though. Emory wondered if Miller would be at Virginia's house. Why, Flinch asked himself, couldn't that fresh-air fiend, Miller, find some sort of exercise for Sunday nights? On this particular Sunday, Emory planned on spending an afternoon with Virginia, dine on whatever Virginia's mother might prepare at no cost to himself, and then take her to the movies.

A slow walk, without breakfast because of the meal he anticipated at Virginia's and telling himself he could save the few cents for ice-cream after the show, took Emory to his destination in an hour.

"Big Boy" was already there. His broken-down flivver betrayed him in front of the grey house. Bitterly, going up the stairs, Flinch wondered how

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Miller, who made only five dollars more than Emory did every week could afford the luxury. If you owned a car, you merely acted as a chauffeur to your friends, paying the bills, while your friends had a gay time at your expense. That was Emory's chief thought as he pulled at the knob, the bell-ringer.

His rival opened the door for him. Miller was jovial. He saw a funny side to everything.

"See you're walking now, Flinch. Good exercise, walking."

The larger man continued his quipping as he strolled by Emory's side down a corridor, into the parlor.

"Walking'll keep you out in the air, sport," Miller agreed with himself, before Emory could bring himself to say more than a meek "Hello."

Emory sat in a soft chair, his hat in his lap, wondering if Virginia were back from church yet, while his rival seemed to go on and on. He was telling how he had changed his sleeping quarters from inside to outside.

Feeling compelled to offer something in the way of conversation before he asked bluntly, "Where is Virginia?" Emory emitted a surprised "Oh!"

Miller took this as a cue and described in detail to Emory how he slept on the porch, covered up warmly but receiving the fullest the winds could give because of the lack of windows and shutters on the sleeping porch.

From that, Miller annoyed Emory with questions about his own habits, impelling Emory to remember that he, Miller, had almost enticed Emory to join the gym at one time.

At this point, Virginia entered and asked Emory to go for a ride with them in Miller's flivver, an invitation which the jolly fellow immediately seconded with a malicious glint in his eye. When Emory declined the pleasure politely, he thought, Miller joked Emory's unwillingness to take a chance in the old car.

Emory would fall apart. He wasn't used to exercise. Virginia laughed.

ALL the way through the park, Emory told himself that Virginia had laughed at him, that Miller had shamed him before her. He thought of what he could do to Miller had he the opportunity. In his mind's eye, he imagined Miller driving his car along with that silly grin on his face and a two-ton truck rushing headlong into the little flivver. And at 60 miles an hour! The thought was pleasant. He even pictured himself driving the attacking machine. That was still pleasanter, only Emory returned to practicality with the realization that he didn't have enough cash to hire a truck, and if he had the money, he had not the license.

How could he get even with that big stiff! Even now, he was probably dancing with the girl somewhere. Maybe Emory should have taken them up on the riding invitation.

But that would have cost Emory something. No telling, he might be stuck for payment of a check when they stopped for a mid-afternoon bite.

In the park, Emory picked up the afternoon *Clarion*. Someone had left it on a bench.

In the jobs' column, he read only one likely job that would offer him a chance to make more money. It was a waiter's position, $25 a week and tips. Such a salary seemed a fortune to Emory at the moment and such a salary would mean that he would be financially able to ask Virginia to be Mrs. Flinch.

The thought that Miller might be ahead of him clouded Emory's mind. For some time, perhaps an hour or two, Emory had no idea, he sat on the bench day-dreaming. In the end, he turned

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down the waiter's job. Too much work. There must be some easier way to make a living.

He proceeded to a drug store, on the corner near his apartment house, purchased a cheese sandwich and a glass of milk, and then started into the tenement.

His landlord nodded to him as Emory passed the old man. Swanson, limping around as usual, was sweeping the front entry. Some spoke of Swanson in whispers. Flinch recalled his neighbor across the hall, Jennie, who had a room almost as dark as his own, swore that Swanson kept his money in a sock, that the cripple was rich and a miser.

Jennie swore by all that was holy that she had seen Swanson counting a table full of coins one day when she went down to borrow a coathanger.

Some people have all the luck, thought the office boy. At 30 years of age, there was no apparent reason for Emory's poverty, he told himself. The world was just for those who were strong, those who helped themselves.

In bed that night, Emory once again watched the luminous shadows on the ceiling. He made an effort to rise to the whiteness far above him. At least, he could take solace in his childhood habit of dreaming his way into a floating, subconscious state, as he did the night before.

He thought of Miller. Miller, a helpless victim, tied hand and foot by a strong rope. And all the while, he, Emory Flinch, was marrying Virginia at the altar. With hate still in his heart, he returned his attention to the ceiling.

IT SEEMED hours that Emory lay thus. The sound of horns in the street below grew fainter and fainter. Breezes through the open window caressed his face. When the breezes turned into winds and became colder, Emory still remained in his trance. But he knew he was not asleep. He imagined himself rising, floating to the ceiling. Aware of a peculiar, indescribable rhythm in his ears, Flinch felt himself as light as a feather. Without looking around, or turning his head, he knew something else—he was fully awake.

Or was he?

With a constant rhythm running through his whole being, a rhythm that he knew must always go on and on like a never-ending river, Emory felt himself free and powerful. Close to the ceiling now, so that he could touch it by a simple lifting of a foot, Emory wanted to prove to himself that he was awake. Nearing the window, he kicked the door-like frame shut with an effort. Then, he quickly lowered his thoughts to the bed. A slight turn of the head showed him that a body was lying beneath him, in his bed—his body!

Morning arrived and with it a headache for Emory. The room was stuffy. No air. Suddenly, he remembered his hallucination of the evening before and looked towards the window.

It was closed!

In the subway train, on the way to work, Emory said it over and over again to himself. The window was closed. He always left it open and today it was closed. Was his dream of floating not a dream? Of course, he explained without believing the explanation, the window could have been closed by the landlord the day before; but then, Emory remembered the breezes of the night air.

Once at the office, Flinch sorted the mail, wondering who in the world would want to keep up a correspondence with Ellen Dodson, the office secretary. She received a green envelope almost without fail every Monday morning. He was curious about those green letters

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and he was more than a little jealous. No one ever wrote to Emory Flinch.

After reading her letter, Dodson filled her vase with flowers. A terrible waste of money, thought Emory. He could live the whole day on the money she spent for silly, inanimate things! Then, very bossily, she assigned Emory his menial duties for the day, as would a teacher of a ten-year-old child. Every morning, Emory suffered this humiliation, never dreaming that Miss Dodson wondered to herself that he did, at his age.

But $18.50 a week is $18.50 a week, better than nothing.

As he ruled spaces and checked boxes on the sheet in accordance with Miss Dodson's own records in front of him, Emory thought about that $18.50. If last night's event was not a part of his imagination, he might be able to do something definite about that measly $18.50, and about Virginia, and about Miller.

And when a salesman entered the office selling ties, Miss Dodson informed the man that Emory hadn't any money to buy anything anyway. So Emory was humiliated again, and he added Dodson to his list. If only he had some power, any sort of power, he would get even with all of them!

WHY, Dodson's petty cash, the money she used for stamps, would be enough spending money for him for a week. With greedy eyes, he watched her separate the nickels from the dimes in the green box. She kept it in her upper left-hand drawer. Emory had made a mental note of the fact years ago, but it had done him no good.

At five o'clock, Flinch was out of the office, making headway for the laundry before it closed. He spent forty-two cents for his weekly supply of shirts, thinking how poor he was that he had to skip dinner for his laundry. He passed Swanson in the hall without a word, threw off his coat and vest when he reached his own room, and took a chair by the window with a book, where he sat until it grew late.

Shortly after dark, nervous and a little tired, Emory switched on the light in the bathroom and deliberately swung the window-door wide. Then, he retired for the night.

For a time, he merely gazed at the half-lighted whiteness of the ceiling. Then the dreamy state came over Emory. Perhaps in childhood, this was part of his imagination. But now, he was certain, he had touched on the realm of the spiritual. In his whole life, Emory had not in the least been interested in the occult; yet he knew that he was delving in it at this moment. As soon as the rhythmic pounding in his ears commenced, he realized he was ascending aloft again. Like his performance of the evening before, his actions this flight were somnambulistic in nature.

Floating in the air, he turned his head to see his body on the bed below. He willed himself to the window and again kicked it shut. Gracefully, managing to duck his head beneath the transom, he guided himself like a fish in water to the bathroom, where he reached down and switched off the light.

He bumped his head as he re-entered his bedroom, forgetting to avoid the transom. Then, he let himself go . . .

The bump on Emory's forehead, the closed window, the bathroom light—all served to convince Flinch that he was bordering on a great discovery. For the time being, he intended to use it for his own purposes. These were Emory's thoughts as he hurriedly dressed the following morning. It was Tuesday, bank day at the office.

It was the day that Emory was sup-

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posed to be sharp. This was the day that Emory kowtowed to stockholders all morning and afternoon. Meetings, phone calls, letters, errands for Miss Dodson—everything combined to make the next twelve hours the most bewildering of Flinch's entire career as an office boy.

Emory's temples pounded. He found himself clumsy. He couldn't think straight. Finally, he settled down at the end of a busy afternoon with a job of licking stamps and envelopes. The job was mechanical and Flinch took the time to think over the events of the past two nights. Should he visit the doctor on the first floor of the building, he asked himself? What if the medical man discovered that he was mentally unwell? Then, again, supposing he had unwittingly stumbled on a scientific novelty? It seemed to him that he had read somewhere of split personalities.

FLINCH was anxious to leave the office, to get away from people. At one and the same time, he dreaded and excitedly looked forward to the moment when he could once more project himself from his body.

He was very, very weary in the subway. He caught himself nodding twice. Reaching his quarters, he put dinner out of his mind completely, sipped a half-glassful of wine, and read a magazine in bed until darkness fell.

There could be no mistake about it. Emory floated upwards from his body. The only characteristic feeling was a rhythmic movement of his whole frame caused by he knew not what in the air. Keeping the motion intact, he practiced sitting up, moving over on his stomach very slowly, raising and lowering his feet. Emory's sixth sense warned him against interrupting the rhythm that beat as a reflection in his ears. He floated around the ceiling, first on one side, then on another. Always, he kept the balance by keeping the rhythm. Now and then, he glanced towards his body 15 feet below.

At noon, Wednesday, Emory phoned Virginia at her office and asked her to accompany him to the movies that evening. But "Big Boy" Miller had already been before him. Virginia very courteously refused the date, but invited him over the following Sunday.

A devilish plot began to form in Emory's brain. Once and for all, he would settle this business of Miller's intrusion. First, however, he would master his new power.

That night was one of experiment for Emory. He floated through the air, squirming through his own transom into the hallway and down the stairs and then out into the night, also through the downstair-door's transom.

Transoms seemed to be the perfect entrances and exits for him. Keeping his rhythmic movement intact, not unlike a bird making infinitesimal flutterings of its wings in regular motion, Emory hovered by a firebox, pulled the lever and watched the engines fly by two minutes later. He pulled the blue hat of a policeman outside the drugstore way down over the officer's eyes. He yanked a store-keeper's ear.

In a nearby restaurant, Emory, sight unseen, grabbed a fork and pricked the bare back of a lady in an evening gown. She screamed. Flinch enjoyed the excitement of the running proprietor, the frightened customers and the lady's frantic escort who tried to stem the trickle of blood with his napkin. To add a finishing touch, Emory leaned down from his floating position and tipped a decanter of hot tea on the lady's lap.

He was exhausted by the time he reached his body and was glad to be

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in the softness of the bed again.

Emory Flinch awoke at dawn and couldn't fall asleep again. Although more tired than he had ever been, and stiff in his muscle-joints, he was jubilant, nervously excited. In the subway train, he offered his seat to an old lady. He bought himself a breakfast for the first time in months. He bought the *Clarion* and perused the advertisements, examining a page of men's suits that were on sale.

AT THE office, he startled Miss Dobson with a cheerful "Good morning." He tore Wednesday off the office calendar before Dodson could remind him to do so.

When he insisted upon standing on a chair and prying open the transom over the door for the sanitary safety of Miss Dodson, that personage felt she knew the answer—Emory must be in love. She told him as much. Emory merely laughed, coyly.

He was in love all right, he told himself, but not without some hope. The odds were on his side now. He was sure of it. Now that he had the power, he experienced the feeling of a successful man for the first time in his life. Even Old Hirschberg noticed the change and wondered at it. He told Emory as much when the two of them were alone at five o'clock. Flinch accompanied his boss to the elevator, purposely forgetting to close the transom over the office door.

Riding in the air in a subway train was a novel experience. It was Thursday evening and Flinch was headed back to the office again. He floated up the stairs. The elevator boy was sleeping in the cellar in his own furnished apartment. No sense waking him up, thought Emory, when floating was so easy.

After passing through the transom, Emory had the impulse to laugh. It was all so easy. His new technique of getting places was so simple and delightful. He had only to keep the rhythm of the pounding in his eardrums. By this time, he was able to make his frame flexible enough for almost anything.

He pulled the desk-drawer open in Dodson's corner, switched the lights on and rummaged inside for the green letters, giving vent to a longtime curiosity. They were love letters from an American soldier. Stationed at a far-off corner of the Globe, he spoke of the burning affection he had for his darling "Honey." Emory memorized one or two phrases like "each day is a million years until I see you." His next act was to bring out the petty cash.

It was all so easy.

Friday was revenge day for the office boy. Emory sang "each day is a million years" under his breath. Dodson heard it and blushed, embarrassed to tears. She suspected Flinch immediately when she discovered the money gone from her petty cash. Especially in view of his knowledge of her intimate letters. But she was afraid to do anything about her suspicions, Emory could see that and he enjoyed it. She feared lest he expose her romantic leanings and replenished the kitty with her own money to the extent of some $11.00.

He was particularly nice to everybody, even to Miller, that day. That individual's eyes stared in amazement when Emory paid the luncheon check at noon. The incident was without comparison in eight years.

NO LONGER afraid to spend money, Flinch was a changed man. He knew he could easily get more. He not only knew, he proceeded to prove to himself that he knew. His floating

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There was a startled expression on Miller's face as the pillow,

took him from one store to another, where he could fit into the transoms that were open. Some cash registers rang up $00.00 but contained a few dollars. Others had nothing. These he avenged himself upon by breaking nearby showcases and counters and show-windows. In one instance, he started a blaze to make up for an empty till. He stood outside the burning storefront and watched the firemen, disturbed from their rest by the call, fight the conflagration. It was a good show, lasting an hour. Emory promised himself he'd repeat the event another time.

When he returned from his astral travels, he was a tired man.

In the morning, Saturday, he remained to count his previous evening's loot. $400.00! Almost six months' salary at the office! Old Hirshberg reduced Emory's cockiness an hour later by chastising him for being late. He informed the bookkeeper in the presence of all that Flinch's pay would be partially "docked this week."

Without a word, Emory walked out of the office and went to a movie.

He was nice to Swanson. He spent five minutes chatting with the old man, who expressed his hopes of having an operation on his leg soon that would

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held by two tenuous hands swept downward—and he couldn't move!

make him as good as any man. Emory wished the landlord good luck and went upstairs to bed and his sinister work.

For a full two hours, Emory tossed, finding it difficult to get himself into the proper state of mind for the task of projection. He assumed he was too anxious because of the assignment he had set for himself. Finally, the ceiling seemed to retreat farther and farther into the distance. Emory floated upwards, through his own transom and downstairs.

Swanson was talking to his wife in the parlor. On the reading table was a pile of wrinkled bills, which probably had been thumbed and fingered over a thousand times that year, so Emory thought to himself. The swagger was Swanson's savings and was the subject of his cackling at that moment.

Hovering over him, Emory stooped for a minute to hear him mutter something about the operation that was coming up and the money that had taken so long to save as payment. Then, the man who was once a meek office assistant scooped the greenbacks up and held them tightly while Swanson began to look high and low for the vanishing money. Emory relished the old man's tears and moans, joined with those of

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his wife, as much as he had the fire the night before.

Sunday was to be the biggest day of Flinch's life. Accordingly, he dressed up in his best suit of clothes. He rode in a taxi to a candy store, where he purchased an expensive present for his lady love. He told the taxi-driver to wait in front of the grey house while he stepped lively up the stairs.

Miller drove up in his newly-polished flivver as Emory came down the steps again, with Virginia on his arm. He blithely announced to "Big Boy" that he was taking her "out to lunch" and also "out to dinner." He kept to the letter of this announcement. After lunch, Virginia enjoyed a ride in the swan boat at the park. She herself was surprised at Emory's loosening of the purse-strings but wisely surmised that he had something up his sleeve. She brought the subject around to it after the movies, while a taxi headed for her house.

IT WAS then that Emory asked her to marry him. He was about to engage in a brand new business. He expected to do well. Tonight was a sample of the good times that they would have together.

Virginia was thoughtful. She took a long time to shape her reply. But Emory waited with the air of a conqueror. Her words made the fire in his heart blaze with hate.

Virginia could not make up her mind between "Big Boy" or Emory, now the new man.

There was only one thing to do. This was the last straw.

It was close to midnight when Emory entered the tenement. A policeman was talking to Swanson on the front steps. Everyone in the neighborhood had heard of Swanson's misfortune. No one sympathized. That was life for you, Flinch remarked to himself, and laughed when he found himself alone in his room.

He sipped the last drop of wine from the bottle, undressed and threw himself into bed. A few minutes later, he sailed through the large transom of the front door. Officer Flynn was still there.

Neither Flynn nor Swanson batted an eyelash as Emory left them. Swanson had no doubt asked the police force for protection, the floater said to himself. That was like locking the barn after the horse was stolen.

It took Flinch 45 minutes to reach Miller's house. Maintaining his astral rhythm, Emory elevated himself to the upper porch, where he knew "Big Boy" slept. The bed was empty.

Angrily, he lowered himself again and set off for Virginia's house. The clock in the city tower struck two o'clock in the morning. The flivver was parked in front of the grey house, which rose up gloomily in the night. But the lights in the parlor were lit. Emory peered into the window like a wild creature. He saw Virginia and his rival talking seriously across a table. A third party was in the room. Miller arose and walked towards the window, then he returned and Emory saw Virginia's father stand and offer his outstretched hand to the young man.

The beam of happiness in both the faces of "Big Boy" and Virginia betrayed the event—Emory realized that his rival had won out.

While Miller drove his car home, Emory floated above it. It sapped a great deal of energy to speed his motion up, but Emory had only one single thought in his mind.

"Big Boy" garaged his flivver. Emory floated to the outside porch where "Big Boy" now entered and began to throw his clothes, humming softly as

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he did so. The unseen figure waited for several minutes after the large, muscular bulk of a man slid beneath his covers. Then, he tugged at Miller's pillow with both hands. Sleepily, Miller groped out for it in the darkness.

WITH a downward sweep, Emory cast the pillow over Miller's face. At once, he grasped under the pillow until his two hands seized his hated rival by the throat. Then Emory squeezed, while the body of Miller writhed with pain. Muffled, gurgling sounds crept pantingly from under the pillow.

The arms which on an ordinary occasion could have overcome four times the strength of Emory Flinch now waved helplessly through the air, fists punching out at nothing.

"Big Boy" put up a terrific fight against the unseen murderer and finally surrendered to his fate. Vengeance had bestowed strength on Emory's arms and the supernatural had warded off any possible injury to Flinch.

It was too late when a frantic father came rushing in to answer the awful, muffled screams for help. The murderer stood—or floated—by while all attempts to revive Miller failed. Emory remained until the doctor arrived to pronounce his rival dead.

By this time, the rain was drizzling down. Emory, wishing he were already home, floated a little faster. He arrived at the door of the apartment house at 3:15. Old Swanson, remembering the robbery, had nailed the transom over the outer door. He was taking no chances.

Tired, the incessant beating in his ears becoming weaker, Emory floated slowly around the house. All the lower windows had been closed tightly by the cautious landlord. The rain began to come down in torrents now. Emory found it difficult to elevate himself up high to his own window. He found each inch an ordeal, until at length he could look through the panes. His own body lay in bed. If only he could get in before the pounding in his ears, now irregular, stopped.

With his slowly draining strength, Emory pushed as hard as he could against the window panes. There was a shattering of glass as he broke through. The rhythmic drone became weaker now. Still, there was a wire screen to combat. As the dawn began to break on the most miserable of all mornings for Emory, he pushed with all his might. But Old Swanson always nailed his screens in.

The half human, half astral being scratched at the checkered veil that remained the only obstacle between life and something the wise men had never written about. The drone was hardly more than a murmur now. The screen was too tough. He felt himself suddenly heavier than before, then he was falling, falling . . .

The *Clarion* carried a story the following afternoon:

FRESH-AIR ENTHUSIAST
DIES AS RESULT
OF SMOTHERING

Guinn Miller, 29-year-old athlete, died early this morning as the result of the smothering effect of a pillow, according to the statement of Doctor. . . . . A strange coincidence was the death of one Emory Flinch by heart failure, the coroner stated. He was employed by the same firm as Miller and died in his sleep the same morning.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH:—

"LAIR OF THE GRIMALKIN"

By G. H. IRWIN

THE RETURN OF A GREAT WRITER WITH A GREAT STORY!

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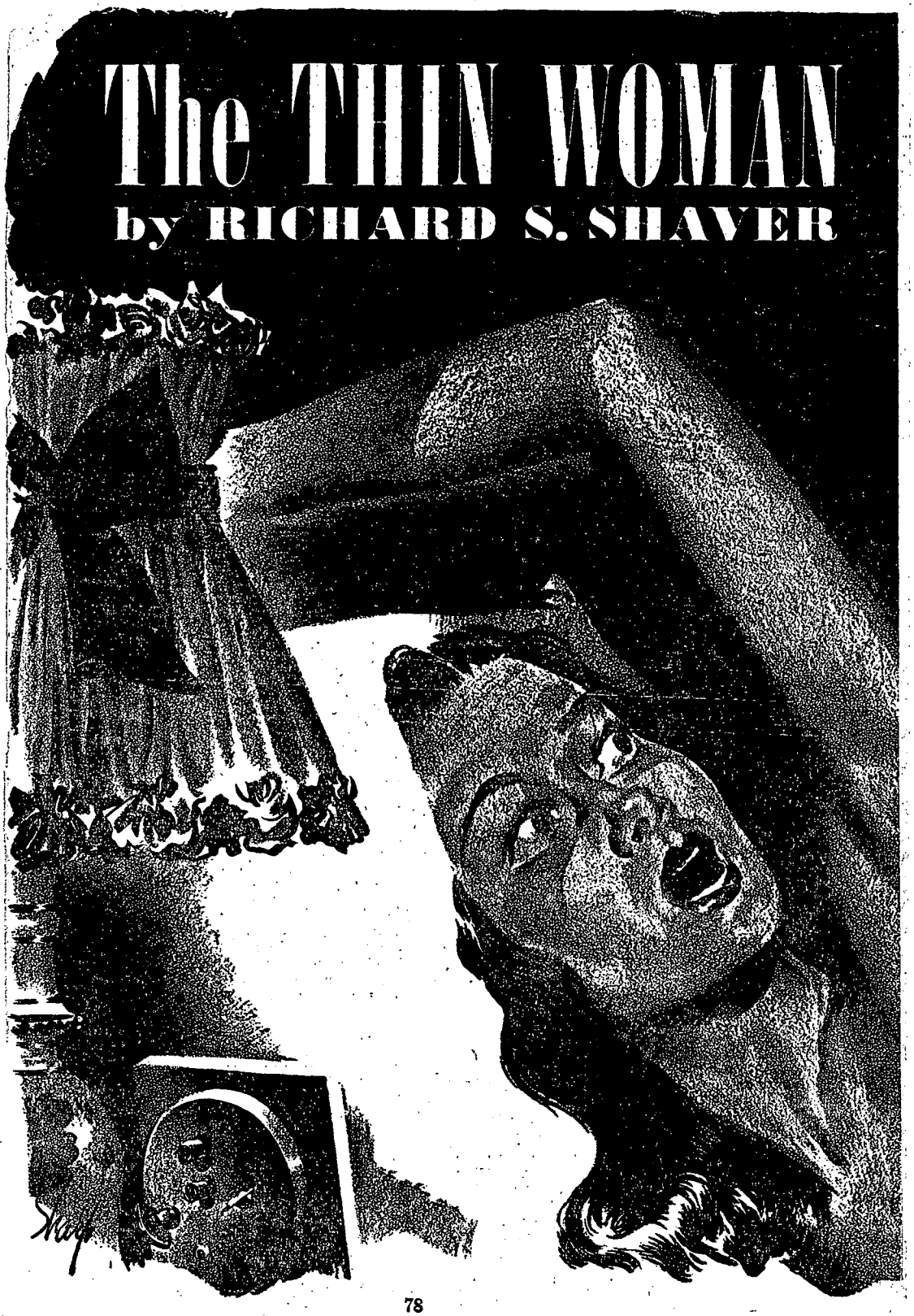
The THIN WOMAN

by RICHARD S. SHAVER



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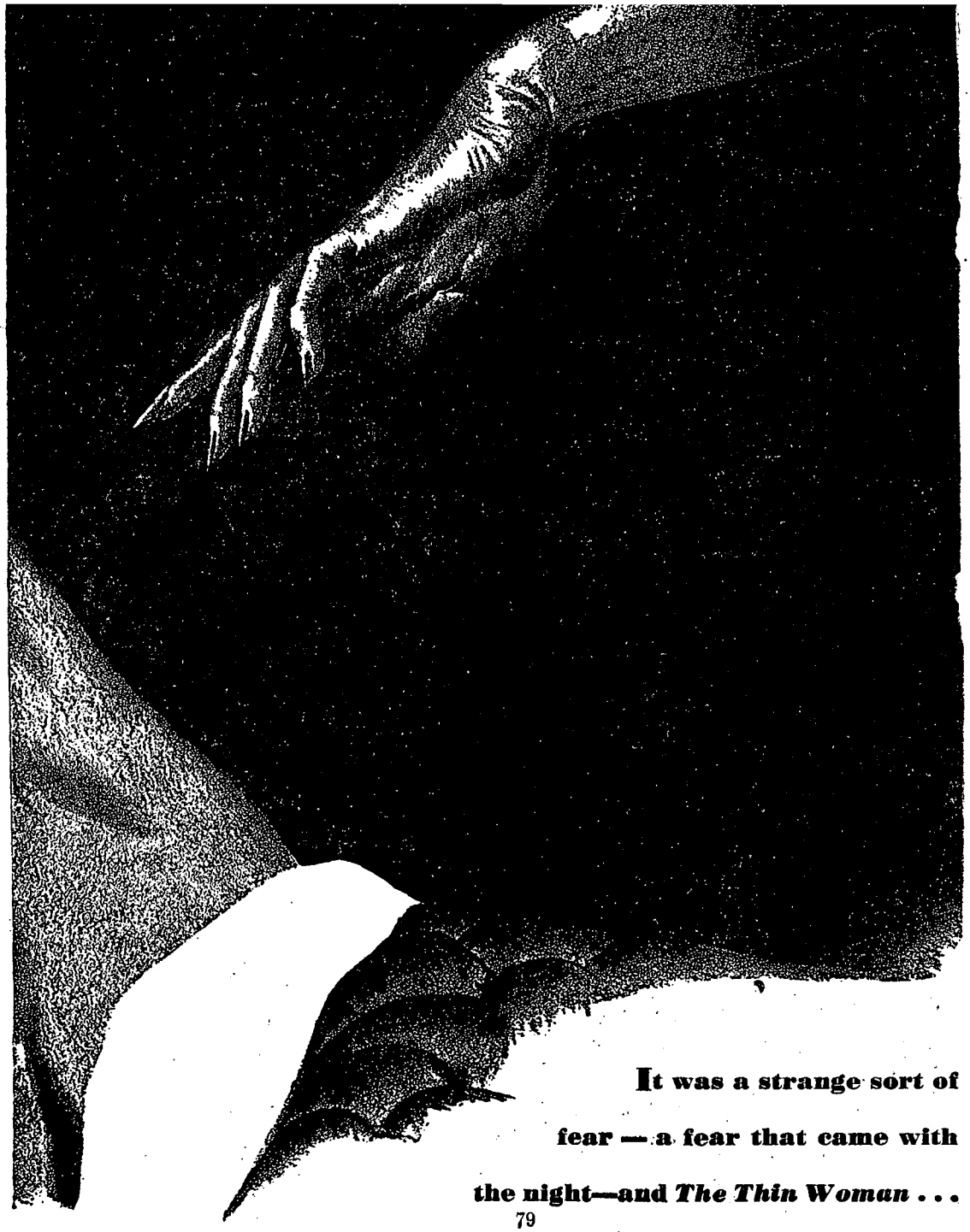

It was a strange sort of fear — a fear that came with the night—and *The Thin Woman* . . .

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IT WAS a fear when it began. A fear that what he thought was a dream, might NOT be a dream. Other men have had that fear. But not from something so lovely, so utterly alien in its strange beauty—something so endlessly cherished within the heart.

Yet it was that lovely unknown *she,* the woman in the night, who had left that fear.

The thin woman began subtly, a slow assembling of many intangibles of the dusk of sleep, a slow materialization of the impossible fantasies of his lonely life into—*the thin woman!*

At first he could not wait to get back into bed, could not wait for the sun to sink, for the lonely beauty of the sheer mountain sides beneath to slip their robe of darkness upon their gargantuan slabbery sides, could not wait for . . . bedtime.

That period was the honeymoon, and it lasted a long, long time.

It might have lasted a lifetime, but for the fear.

That came subtly, too, compound of many little things that slowly, awfully assumed terrific, crushing significance.

Like the tiny, fairy-like book. It was printed in some unknown language, and the pictures were of nothing on this earth. They were pictures of a life and a time and a place no man's mind could ever conceive. He had spent a lot of time over that book, wondering how it came to be upon his night table—the morning after! *After* . . . he dared not think that out.

Yet he must face it. It was after he had failed to fall asleep, and had heard that odd shuddering sound deep under the house, within the rocks. Deep at first, it had come closer, and he had lain and wondered what it was. Then had come the faint steps, closer and more distinct, but still no human ever made such sounds upon floors with its feet. He could remember faintly that thin long white hand upon the door, but after that his mind refused. Just plain refused!

There were a multitude of such things in the book. He picked it up, looking long at the idiotically meaningless typefaces, wondering just how such intricacies could ever *mean* anything and still be so utterly lovely.

He was afraid to show the book to anyone. Anyway there weren't many came here to show such a thing to . . . Not anyone capable of understanding why it was anything other than an ordinary, but foreign book.

It couldn't be what he suspected. He must be going mad, and that was the second great fear that loomed now always behind the other one. It was of course but a bit of obsolete decorative printing in some obscure tongue that had accidentally found its way into his house in the long periods when he had been absent. It had been picked up absently by himself, laid by the bed table for use in puzzling himself into sleep—and then forgotten. Later, he had attached undue significance to the odd little volume because the recurrent, usual dream had been overexciting—upsetting him.

Then, if that were true, there remained but the recurrent dreams to explain away, and sanity would be clear before him, his mind his own possession and dwelling place.

But, the fear remained and it was not anything but this—that he *was* sane, and not mad in the least! Recurrent dreams were no proof of madness. Many people had them.

IF HE didn't long for her so. *If* the bright days had not turned into tortuous expanses of burning, empty sunlight—*If* his life had not become completely enclosed in hers.—*If* he was

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not a man in a spell waiting always for sleep to release him—*if* a great many things that were not as they should normally be. *If!*

That word *if* was too constantly in his thoughts. If only he could see her with his waking, daylight eyes. If only she would cease her masquerade and become a part of normal life in the brazen sunlight. But she told him that could never be—that she was alien and that the light of day—any light at all—was deadly to her. That if he saw her with a waking man's eyes he would scream in refusal and be forever lost to her. That she was not anything that could be seen except as he saw her—with the true eyes of a mind asleep.

The eternal nagging questions kept on and on and on—*what was she?*—Why did she come to him so persistently, so readily? Like a wife to her home, she came to his sleep.—Yet, *she did not exist!* Why should a dream possess him so completely? Why couldn't he throw the dream aside and go out into the world, down that mountain side into the bright, soft, fleshy, real and glittering life of the cities? Why did he, a young man still, hide himself away here with a dream his only companion?

He lay the book down, and left the bed chamber, left the silent gloom of his only place of pleasure, of life's strange metamorphosis into another thing than life, and strode down and out through the great old house. Past the ancient shelves where the relics of two hundred years of Bronsons quietly gathered the dust of neglect.

Past the great mirrored doors where long ago the great had circled in the dance, past the long gloomy trophy hall where some of his own game also gathered dust, now that the *Thin Woman* was mistress here.

And *she did not exist!* His mind shuddered, put her away, and his body went out into the sun. But the heart of him, the reason for living, the spirit and marrow of him, sat still up there in the great darkened sleeping room and waited—waited for the passing of the unimportant day and the coming of the all-important night. Night, night, NIGHT . . . it went on and on, inside him, and off up there in the great house of his ancestors—"night"—"night"—a prayer and a confession and a magic charm and a word rich with reverberating meanings beyond meaning, of love and constancy and ecstacy and fatherhood and motherhood and the dim past shrieking of its awful secrets—NIGHT.

Himself strode on into the forest, modern man, booted and breeched and jacketed with modern clothes — yet bearing within him the long arm of *incubus,* or was it *succubus?*—He couldn't think. Bearing within him the ancient magic of the night, the dark, deep eyes of *possession* loomed over the horizons of his mind.

YET it was so infinitely satisfying, so *right,* so irresistible. There was no denying her, no revulsion, no nothing but an endless knowledge of her all through him; an infinite sense of her *worth,* of his own relatively unimportant status in the scheme of things. He was man, average, unimportant man.—She was genius and wisdom, magic and enchantment, mind and sweet endless benevolent intent.—And she was *night,* and ever about and behind and through her hovered the evil that threatened—*threatened*—what?

Just another question, added to the awful mass of questioning his thinking had become. And she would not, could not answer him, and it troubled them both.

There were the other objects, Bronson thought, slashing savagely at an

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inoffensive bush with his stick. The things that had been there in the morning, and that should not have been. The things his mind refused even to remember. Yet he knew, he knew how many there had been that he had destroyed—refusing. And now memory flooded back to torture him, and he writhed inwardly, and the waiting Bronson, up there in the bed-chamber—the love-chained Bronson that was himself and that he refused except in his sleep—*that* Bronson laughed at this one's stupid self-torture. And as abruptly his refusing mind closed down the curtain of memory and he forgot the torturing memories again.

He would have to send for Evans. Harry, good old Harry, would set him right. He would save him.

Off in the bed-chamber, the real Bronson laughed—to himself. For he did not *want* to be saved. Nothing so wonderful as this "madness" had occurred to him, ever—and his mind insisted on planning ways of getting "free." It was too foolish. But reason said that if it was madness, if the whole slowly growing, materializing wonder of HER was only madness—the sooner he retrieved himself from the morass the better.

Love, a morass? His mind just could not cope with this—and that was the thing that was driving him mad, for he could not *understand*. She just did not realize his terrible need of understanding. In his sleep all that waking need of reason and sanity and knowing whys and wherefores was absent. He could enjoy life in his sleep.

But since when did a healthy man occupy his waking time just waiting for sleep to begin again? She had a place to go, something to do, wonder to occupy herself with—and she did not *need* what he called reason. But himself was a modern man! He could not accept . . . *enchantment!*

Bronson went back to the great lonely house, called up Evans—off in his prosaic, human office in the city.

EVANS drove rapidly. Another half hour would bring him to the slopes of the mountain Mairam, and within sight of the huge and ancient House of the Bronsons.

Queer, thought Evans, how young Bronson had holed up here. With everything to make life a round of pleasure, travel, sport, women and social activities his occupation, with no reason to spend his days in work as less fortunate men;—he had chosen, quite suddenly—to make his home here away from all men—to become a recluse.

In college, he had given every promise of becoming a noteworthy figure. But, after a few short years of travel, he had disappeared from the knowledge of his friends. Evans had known where he was—but there was no reason and no invitation to seek him out. Now came this call . . .

Frank Evans parked his car in the wide gravel approach to the house, took his bag out of the rumble seat, set it on the ground.

Bronson came out of the wide doors, a tall man with haunted eyes, pale skin, rumpled hair of a startling blackness. Evans could not see that his hermit-like life had changed him greatly. A bit thinner, perhaps, but not much. He looked very fit, in truth.

Bronson shook hands with the stocky, tweed-suited, r u d d y - f a c e d friend. Evans looked very capable, very much the successful lawyer.

"I just had to talk to someone. You are the only close friend I ever had. I hope I haven't butted into your activities or put you out."

"No. Glad to get away. I've been sticking too close to the grindstone. I'm

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hungry as a bear. Do you have food way out here so far from the delicatessen?"

"Plenty of food. No one but myself and old Barnes to eat it. He is so deaf, though, he's like having no one around. You can't talk to him, he never gets it straight. I use gestures, he does whatever he thinks is expected."

"Just what do you stay up here for, anyway? It seems so strange for a man like you to refuse the life of the world for this solitary place."

"That's why I called you. To explain and to ask your advice. Not that I think you can do anything for me. No one can, I am sure. But I owe myself the effort at least."

Evans looked down the long rocky slopes up which he had just driven. Fir and hemlock and spruce, many of them hundreds of years in the growing, gave the scene a gloomy grandeur. Upward from the rather square and squat old house the same slopes leaped even more abruptly, up and up toward the snow-line, where the mountain tops dreamed lazily, in magnificent, tranquil dignity. A long snow plume played about the tall white peak of Mt. Mairam.

Over the roast beef, Evans asked: "Might as well start telling me, and get it off your chest."

"After. It isn't anything that can be said in a few words. Let's take the coffee into the lounge."

"IT ALL began with a strange dream. One of those dreams where you walk, and strange and new and wonderful things are half seen. I kept trying to isolate and pin down some of the things in the dream. You know, in dreams, you never *can* remember afterward. But I *did!* I caught an elusive something, and held it close to my eyes, held it tight."

Bronson paused, looking at Evans with his deep, enigmatic eyes. "It was a hand, a human hand!"

"What about the hand?" Evans was puzzled.

"It was an *alien* hand. A woman's hand. And it was pleased, grateful in my own hands. I . . . there's just no way to tell you."

"Seems you had better try. You've gone this far. What did the hand have to do with making a hermit out of you."

"It possessed me. It was a woman's hand, and it possessed me!"

Evans started. My God, he thought, the poor fellow has really gone off his trolley. He'll need a psychiatrist, not me.

"Since that night, that hand has opened my bed room door every night. I live only for that moment when she comes."

"What is she like?" Evans leaned forward.

"That's just it. She seems very long and thin, attenuated. Very white with long soft lips that droop a little sorrowfully. She is like an enchanted person, who cannot free herself . . . and she is wholly *alien* to anything we know."

"I don't get it!"

"I don't get it either, Frank. I don't understand anything except that I'm madly in love with a creature who is hardly human, who never allows me to see her with *waking* eyes. She comes only *after* sleep, and she goes *before* I awake. But . . . and here's the rub —she is NOT a dream."

"Not a dream? Explain that one, or forever after expect me to think you have lost your mind!"

"I placed some flour about my bed. In the morning there were tracks, and they were not my own. They were feet, a woman's unbelievably long and thin and delicate feet, and they were shod. Shod with some fine soft material

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through which even the toes made imprints on the floor."

Evans only sat there shaking his head. "I just don't get it. What are you trying to tell me, anyway?"

"I'm trying to tell you that in this modern age, I am possessed by a dream-shape which leaves footprints and comes to me every night. Isn't that enough?"

"I think you're plain goofy from being alone. I think you'd better come along home with me, forget this place, and find a wholly different way of life. I think you're driving yourself mad and though I don't know why, or what the cause may be, I do know you're in a dangerous condition. You are believing a fairy tale, and that might be all right for a boy ten years old—but it is certainly nothing a grown man can get away with. I've heard enough!"

"But the footprints! I set a camera too. Wait while I get the prints."

Evans looked a long time at the snap. There was nothing on it but an opening door and one unbelievably long and unbelievably delicate hand reaching around the edge of the door to keep it from swinging wide open. It was a photograph of a ***hand*** such as no human, Evans had ever seen, possessed! His mind refused to think about it at all. He handed it back.

"That ties me, Bronson. I have nothing to say after that."

"What I really want to know, Frank, is this—If you were me, what would you do about this woman? I love her, I can never see her except after I have fallen asleep. She seems to control my sleep and when I am awake, I wait impatiently for the night and sleep again. I am possessed by her, mad about her, and I can't seem to break down the impossible wall between us that I can't understand. Like you, I think I am mad, and then this photo, the memory of the footprints, and *the book*."

"What book? You didn't mention a *book*."

"ONE morning there was upon my dressing table an object I had very obviously *never placed there!* It was a book *in an alien tongue!* She must have left it, but why? *I can't read it!* It's beautiful, yes, but meaningless to me."

"Get it! She must have meant something." Evans' brain was in strange condition, the condition of accepting the truth of an impossibility. He knew he must be very careful, very sure of all his thought—to make no assumptions without sufficient evidence—must understand this thing, for it was deep water, over his head. He had no idea what to think, but he was sure going to do *some thinking* about this. Never in his life had any mystery seemed to him unexplainable, no superstition or phenomena seemed anything but childish to him—the childish misfunctioning of some brain that made the commonplace seem the bizarre. But here he was face to face with the weird and unexplainable—and everything he had accepted in his mind as unalterable and stable and true was shaken, falling within him. His mind boiled, reaching out after the meaning and the wonder of this "thin woman"—and his mind kept whispering subtly—*something, then, was true of the ancient tales of magic.* Something was true in the past that is not ***known*** today.

The problem was too much for Evans. His mind retreated, as men's minds always do before that fearful unexplainable thing that contains factors their school-taught logic will not handle, cannot be made to embrace. He began to explain away the book, the photographs, the footprints, with the trite ancient phrases with which men

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It seemed as if she were in the background, always watching him . . .

of education have met the primitive and awful truth of miraculous phenomena which are not primitive at all—but which can be made to appear so.

"These things are also products of your delusions, Bronson. So far as I can see, you must be in such a mental state that you go into a kind of trance during which your body is in control of the deluded part of your mind. *You* make those footprints, *you* got that book somewhere in some old second hand store, *your* mind has deluded it—self into playing tricks on itself! I think the only answer is for you to leave here, go away, marry, take up an active life of a normal kind. Forget the whole thing!"

"If I only could," murmured Bronson, looking at Evans sadly with a wise and ancient expression. It is the expression with which those who know of magic always look at those who do not know and cannot understand. "But I cannot *even want to!* I am in love, and even if the being whom I love is but a creation of my own disordered mind, I will not give her up. Nor could she give me up, Evans. If I did what you suggest she would find a way to

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revenge herself! I know her, she would find a way to get her own back again. She would find a way! I *cannot* leave, Evans. You see . . . She is with child!"

Evans started. "She is going to have a child! And you have never even seen her? You must realize it's a ridiculous obsession! You will ruin your whole life. You must leave here!"

HOWEVER it was done, the time-worn arguments, the well known words, at last won. Bronson agreed to leave, to give life a chance to free him from his "obsessions." Evans insisted, once he had won his point, on making the trip that very night, before "she" had a chance to turn him from his promise. So it was that Evans' car bore them away that evening, before the dark had even lain it's robe of soft purple on the slabbery sides of Mt. Mairam.

But something within Bronson's breast shivered and sobbed and wept with lonely dread of the days to come. The sorrow did not stop, the sensation of terrible bereavement did not cease. The pain, the hidden gnawing hurt, drove him from liquor to sport to women. And at the last to a marriage he knew would never work. For he loved the thin fragile foot that came from the dark night below, loved the hand-that-was-too-thin that opened his door, and for him this lovely apple-cheeked, healthy, robust female was only an experiment in *"self betterment."* She was to him only perhaps a door to life without the gnawing want of the dream that was his all. She offered him escape from a long, thin, desiring reaching that drew and drew him back, drew him with a promise of alien indescribable delight. And the part of him that men call the sane mind refused, and argued, and pleaded and won—its own way of life.

The honeymoon passed, a sweet month of voyaging to the Caribbean, of fishing on the sunny quiet sea, of dreaming and talk in the moonlit night, and of soft promises that his heart shrank from giving, but which his sanity compelled.

Then somehow that elastic band that had drawn so steadily and so long became firm, irresistible! It was as though his resistance had at last worn out against the steady pull, and that now, worn out, he must give in.

So it was that the long car drove up the long slopes of Mt. Mairam. In the car were Mr. and Mrs. Bronson. And the night lay ahead of him, and his body quivered with anticipation of some incredible long denied need to be supplied, some consuming thirst to be once again quenched. So that he hardly noticed the pale cheek of his new wife, or her inward shudder at the sight of the huge and gloomy old house, or her frightened eyes trying to brave the impossible heights and depths and stark impossible rocky cliffs of Mt. Mairam. Or *did* he notice, and fail to care?

The big deaf servant that only answered to gestures, and mouthed his uncouth sounds that passed for words set her into near hysterics, so that he had to give her brandy to calm her. But his real self hardly noticed for it was waiting, quiveringly waiting for the coming of the night.

The night came. And Edith put on her daring black lace negligee over her sheer black nightie that he had given her, among many other things, after the wedding. Edith calmed her racing heart, held still her plucking nervous fingers, and made her eyes seek out the shadows of the dull old house and see there was nothing there to frighten anyone. Edith resolved to conquer this place as she had conquered the dark

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brooding in Bronson's eyes, and bring out the laughter here as she had the laughter in him. Edith went to bed.

After a long time, Bronson followed. The house grew still, too still. Far down, the big clock in the dark library ticked. Beneath that, far down, began for Bronson that strange movement that only he had ever heard. Nearer and nearer it came, rushing with those long thin ecstatic feet. Her Lord had returned! She would join him once again in ecstasy unbearable! Nearer, nearer . . .

IN THE dark, he knew that incredible hand had opened the door, was even now visible, if he could see in the dark as she did. Bronson waited, *was* he awake? Soft, soft, the unbelievable feet that no sane man could ever believe in slid nearer, the soft delicate fingers touched his face, his lips, his hair, his eyes. Slid on across the bed—touched Edith!

That fearful scream came like the tearing of the Temple curtain, like the sightless veils of time reft by a wind, like darkness shattered with lightning. Edith leaped to her feet, and light flooded that room in which no light had ever been allowed by Bronson, at night. Not before. He sat up, awake. He saw one swift glimpse of that he knew was there. That long, thin hand before the eyes that could not know light, those limbs that were too long, too thin for beauty and yet were beautiful as lilies in their fragile perfection. That tall graceful figure, so thin yet somehow lordly. That floating hair clouding her in a bright nimbus. . . . Then she was gone, slipping through the door like smoke on soundless feet. The door closed so softly behind her, as a breath of wind might have touched it, made the lock click. And Edith screamed, not once in rending sorrow—but again as had the *thin woman* and again in unbearable fear. Again and again and again until he could bear it no longer, but got up and left her.

He stood there in the hall looking in the mirror at his own face, and what he saw was somewhat the thing a murderer sees. He had slain something impossibly fine and above the dross of earth. He had been guilty as no man can be guilty and survive. He turned from his own guilty face with disgust. How can a man be such a fool? And in his mind *her* whisper echoed, "How?"

TIME passed. The days were swift and clean and bright. The mystery and dark beauty and strange dreams had left Bronson. Life became pleasant but somehow *empty* as a lovely room that waits for a tenant who never comes, and *never will.* Bronson hunted on the mountainside, or drove into town with Edith to a show, or played golf as before the strange possession had been upon him.

The months passed, and Edith grew big with child. And the child was born and laughed up at Bronson with the Bronson blue eyes, and grinned at him with Bronson lips. Happiness haunted the big bleak house like a stranger who was not quite welcome. And a benediction seemed to rest over them wearily, like a sorrowful mother, and life was good. Not wonderful, but certainly good.

Then came that day that Edith left little Robert for a minute in the nursery. Came that moment when he heard her scream that terrible repeated scream of fear that he had heard but once before.

He came running on somehow leaden feet, for in his heart *he knew.* No child borne of such sorrow as *hers* could live for long, children not *borne with* a *will to live* . . .

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He stood with a now collapsed and quiet, an unconscious Edith in his arms. He looked down into the carriage where his son had lain. *His son still lay there*, but his heart sank and sank! *This* child, with the Bronson blue eyes staring up blankly, these long attenuated hands, this thin yet somehow strong body, these lean and sorrowful lips—this was *not* Robert! *This child was nearly a year older . . .*

Unbelieving he reached out and touched the tiny hands folded beneath the sharp chin, touched the bulging, too-big brow that was yet the Bronson brow.

The changeling was dead!

In his mind that voice whispered, now fierce and no longer ecstatically his own complement, but the voice of a mother who will not be denied.

"Your deed killed the will to live in my child. You killed my love, and your child died. I will raise this one never to trust the light, or those who dwell in the light!"

A faint echo of that voice—"Forgive me, my Lord, forgive me, I cannot bear it. I cannot bear the dark alone. . . ."

FINIS

IS THE EARTH HOLLOW?

By H. R. STANTON

DOZENS of fantasy stories have been written on that theme—is the Earth hollow? Among these are the famous stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs—the "Pellucidar" series which appeared some years ago in this magazine, and in *Amazing Stories*. Jules Verne wrote his famous "A Journey To The Center Of The Earth" with that idea in mind. What provoked these ideas?

For one thing, it has never been satisfactorily explained just how ocean currents originate. For another, it has never been completely explained how some of the Northern peoples originated. Is it then, so illogical to assume that there exists a place unfamiliar to us—perhaps even unknown to us? This certainly aids in explaining a lot of things. Modern scientists scoff of course at any such theories, maintaining that the Earth is a much more rigid thing than we have believed in the past. Regardless of this, many interesting ideas have been projected on this thesis.

The German geologist of the nineteenth century, Otto von Erdenlanger wrote a fantasy which has some popularity. It was called, "In The Depths Of The World" and it involved a party that was shipwrecked on Greenland in the dead of winter. This party was originally an exploration group intending to do work on Iceland's volcanic structure. In any event, the group found a cave opening (very similar to Jules Verne's story here) which they entered just in the nick of time to prevent freezing to death. They penetrated the cave for many miles, found that it was amazingly warm and finally came upon an opening in a downward direction—a gentle slope. They followed it carefully and found a world peopled by creatures who were very similar to human beings except that they had the natural faculty of telepathy. After many adventures—they were at first taken for hostile—they made friends with the inhabitants eventually, decided to remain in this rather paradise-like world. There have been many other similar stories written, but those of Verne and Burroughs show the most imagination by our standards.

* * *

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The MINIATURE GOD

By FRAN FERRIS

WELL known to every archaeologist and ordinary reader, are the mysterious giant images of the gods of Easter Island. These gigantic human heads of stone conceal a great mystery. Who created them? What sort of a people could have built them? The vast temple of Angkor Wat in the jungles of Cambodia in French Indo-China similarly hides a mystery that has never been solved satisfactorily. Guess and hypothesis have tried to offer answers. None has proved satisfactory.

Lesser known than these great mysteries but equally fascinating, is the village of Tefra. Jules Trecaire, anthropologist, archaeologist and explorer, a man widely traveled and learned, offered his report to the French Academy of Science in 1928 after having spent the better part of his life in French Equatorial Africa.

In that year he was conducting a survey for the French government, of all the various tribes, almost too numerous to keep track of. About one hundred miles inland from the coast, he and his party encountered an apparently barren stretch of jungle, barren in the sense that no tribes inhabited it and none would venture into it for some unknown reason. Trecaire however was first and foremost a scientist and it only increased his determination to study the territory even if he couldn't get native guides. Being the only white man in his party he attempted his exploration of this thousand-square mile tract of land alone.

It wasn't long before he found exactly what caused the natives to shun the area as if it had been poisoned. On the third day in the jungle, Jules Trecaire discovered a village, a village without a single living soul in it—nor were there any dead. It was a typically stockaded affair, with a large number of thatched huts filling it. In the center of the village was a huge grass hut about three hundred feet long. Trecaire walked into the unlit building, his lantern and flashlight and gun at hand. The structure was completely empty. Not quite—at one end was a small table—mind you, nothing was in this hut but the table and on it an image. The image was of wood, about eighteen inches high and exquisitely carven. The craftsman who had made it was truly an artist. Trecaire approached it and studied it closely. It was crude and simple, but in its simplicity and crudeness lay its very greatness, which is often the case with fine pieces of art. It was made up of the head of a man—a native African, of course—and the body was that of an elephant. The representation was not exact but enough so to clearly indicate that it was god-like for on the face of the wooden image was carved what might be regarded as a mocking grin.

Trecaire left the hut and proceeded to thoroughly explore the compound. There was not the single trace of an inhabitant, past or present. No cooking utensils, no tools—simply nothing. And the little wooden elephant-god. Of course when Trecaire left, he took the elephant-god with him. He turned it over to the authorities when he later arrived in France and it was exhibited with a collection of native African art-work.

Finally it was consigned to a museum of African objects and probably forgotten about. But there was an odd appendix to this story. Trecaire had pointed out that from the condition of the village some tribes must have visited regularly for worship—in secret, of course. What strange rites they must have conducted can only be conjectured.

In 1937, a government commission came upon the site of the place where Trecaire had removed the image and found the spot almost blighted. The village was a shred of itself. The jungle had almost completely over-grown it and the main hut that had housed the god was in ruins. But the archaeologists noted a unique fact: On the low table that Trecaire had mentioned, was a duplicate of the little elephant-god!

* * *

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When did time begin? Where did our world come from? To find out would you have to start from scratch — Zero A.D.?

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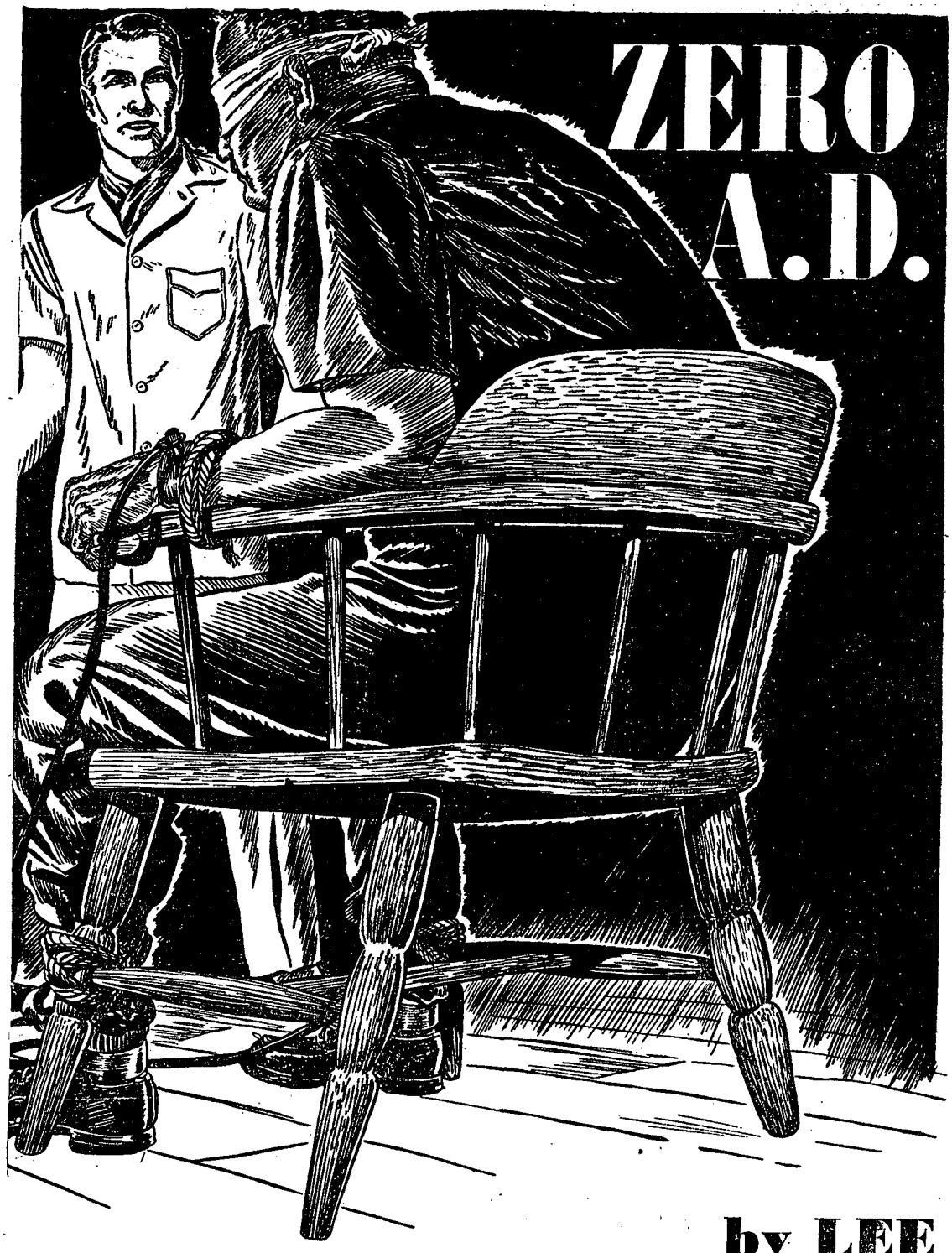

ZERO A.D.

by LEE FRANCIS

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"Facts compel me to conclude that my brain was never formed for much thinking."—Charles Darwin

THE news-room was warm, smoky and filled with the smell of ink. The presses down in the press room pounded and rumbled as though they were trying to tear the *Daily Express* building down stone by stone. Not that it would have been hard. The *Express* is more than an institution in this town. It's been here since the first mayor was tossed out of office for allowing wide open gambling. The *Express* tossed him. It's been housed in the same grim-faced brown stone building since the first police chief lost his job for letting Mugs Malone have a free hand in the narcotic trade. The *Express* got rid of him.

You get the point. The *Express* has power and plenty of it. The *Express* takes a stand and fights to the last ditch. I, being a righteous sort myself, stick with the boss because he's that kind of a guy.

Tonight the late edition has been put to bed and only Larry Keen and myself are still holding on. I hate to leave the place at night. There's as much ink in my veins as there is blood and I hate to miss a minute because some gangster always gets his when I'm tucked into bed and I don't hear about it until the next morning.

Keen looked up suddenly from his dilapidated desk half way across the room.

"Johnny," he said, and motioned with his little finger.

Larry Keen isn't the movie version of a managing editor. He doesn't drink much and he doesn't wear a green eye shade. He works because he likes to work. Keen has iron gray hair, penetrating black eyes and a hatred for wasted motion. When he beckons with a little finger it carries weight.

I crushed my cigarette stub out on the side of my desk, lowered my feet to the floor and moved toward him. Keen held the telephone in his hand, palm cupped over the receiver. He wasn't smiling.

"Talk with this fellow, will you, Johnny?" he asked. "Professor Crocket of Pinecrest University. He's no dummy, so take it easy."

That was all. I didn't have an idea in the world what Crocket wanted, but that's the way Larry Keen depended on me. If the Governor had called, he'd have said the same thing. I took the phone.

"Professor Crocket?" I asked.

The voice from the other end said: "Yes! *James* Crocket. I understand you've been assigned to interview me?"

I raised an eyebrow at Keen, but he was busy again, comparing twin-leads for tomorrow's editions.

"I guess so," I said as politely as possible. "If you've got a story we'd like to have it."

Give crack-pot or genius the same treatment is the *Express* policy. Sometimes a pretty thin line divides them.

"Good!" I liked the sincere enthusiasm in Crocket's voice. "I have what I consider a sensational story. I'm releasing it to the *Daily Express* because I admire your paper. Would it be possible for you to see me the first thing tomorrow morning?"

"Just a moment," I said, and covered the receiver. Keen sensed that I wanted his advice. He looked up.

"Crocket wants to see me tomorrow morning. Has some stuff for us. Sunday Supplement I imagine."

Keen grinned.

"I do not dictate the actions of my star reporter," he said. "How does it

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sound?"

"It doesn't," I said, yet I had a feeling that I ought to see Crocket. "I could run out at ten in the morning. Probably get away from him in half an hour."

Keen nodded.

"Good," he said.

I confirmed the hour over the phone, said goodnight to Crocket and hung up. Larry stared at me, a smile on his lips.

"I don't suppose this will rock the world *or* the *Daily Express,*" he said.

I'll admit I was puzzled.

"My vacation," he explained. "It starts tonight, remember?"

I sat down on the edge of his desk.

"That's right," I said. Editor breaks down and goes to lake for fishing trip. "Everything lined up while you're gone?"

KEEN nodded. In spite of his fifty years and gray hair, he looked at that moment like a school boy. I knew the strain he was throwing off when he left for the fishing trip.

"Sunday issue is all set to ride," he said. "I'll be in Monday afternoon. You can judge for yourself the value of Crocket's material. If it's good, tell Read to sidetrack the *Fish and Fowl* article in the Supplement and put in yours."

I felt a little doubtful. I was uneasy about changing anything when Larry was away. I've been depending on him too long. Damned if I'd ruin his trip with my worries.

He ignored me then, returning to the work on his desk.

I wanted to walk out and leave him alone, but I couldn't do it. The longer I sat the more I wondered about that interview with Crocket. The man was something of a genius and I knew it. He had exploded so many scientific theories in his time that half the country was with him and the other half would like to cut his throat. Keen knew it. I think it gave him a secret kick to put me on my own like that. Finally he tossed his work aside and stood up.

"Tomorrow at this time I'll be sitting by a campfire eating fresh bass," he said. He rubbed his stomach.

"Look, Larry," I interrupted. "I don't feel just right about going ahead on my own with . . ."

"'Nuts!" He smiled broadly. "I knew something was troubling you. When I look at you, Johnny, I see an intelligent young giant of twenty-seven who graduated from college and should have some real brains under his brown wig. I see a pair of eyes that could analyze news as well as I can. Didn't I train you myself? You can use your own judgment this time."

I shrugged.

"Guess I'm somewhat of a baby when it comes to filling other people's boots," I admitted. "Okay, Larry, take it easy up there at the lake. Bring home some of your catch if you can manage it."

We shook and he promised to pack some bass on ice when he came in Monday. The presses were turning over at full speed now. The office quivered under the force of the vibration. We went down the narrow, ink blackened stairs to the street. Outside, the trucks were just rolling in for the morning edition. It was noisy at the front of the building, but a block away night made everything still and deserted.

I left Larry at the corner and caught a cab. Then the reaction set in. There had been a reason for my nervousness about the Crocket article. I wanted to tell Keen, and sometimes, after all hell broke loose, I think he might have suspected all the time.

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The nervousness had been caused by Crocket's parting remark over the phone.

"Be prepared," he said in a calm voice, "for an article that will rock the thinking world. An article that will shake even the honest, solid foundations of the *Express* to the core of its editorial heart."

A speech like that from a man of Crocket's mental caliber should have been a danger signal I could spot a mile away. Twenty-four hours later, it *couldn't* be stopped. Yet, I'm not sure to this day whether or not I'm sorry I went against my better judgment and printed James Crocket's world shaking article.

CHAPTER II

Dynamite Explodes

"If I am wrong, the sooner I am knocked in the head and annihilated, the better."—Charles Darwin

A GLIMPSE of *Who's Who* told me that Professor James Crocket was approaching his fifty-fifth birthday and had been credited with a long and successful career. He taught a variety of subjects at Pinecrest University, which was recognized as one of the top rank colleges of the Middle West. Having gathered what little information I could from the reference library, I called Ann Shelton, set our luncheon engagement ahead to one o'clock and hailed a cab.

Fifteen minutes later we were winding up through the wooded hills of Pinecrest Township toward the college campus.

Pinecrest is one of those evergreen hidden retreats that would make any man feel a little better for just being near its old ivy covered buildings. I paid off the cab and watched it slip down the drive and out of sight among the trees. I stood for some time, hesitating, before going in. That nagging, uneasy feeling came back. I knew before I pushed open the glass door of the Administration Building that I should turn around and run to beat hell back to my own little world of petty crime and human failure. As I went in, I removed my hat, and my hand on the brim was cold and wet.

I learned at the information desk that Crocket had a free hour between ten and eleven and had left word for me to come to his rooms. A student guided me across the campus and into a small, red-brick building well hidden behind the new, more carefully planned structures. Not that Crocket's quarters were neglected, or in any sense, had the atmosphere of alchemy and mystery. Instead, the building I found myself in was small, two storied and held a dignity that comes after being lived in constantly for many years.

We walked along a short hall to a sunny, pleasant laboratory at the rear of the structure. The student knocked on the door then scuttled away as though his life depended on getting out of sight before Crocket appeared.

The door opened and I found myself facing a tall, smooth featured man. His eyes were gray and his hair, the same color, looked as though it had been carefully washed and combed just before I came in. He extended a frail, very white hand.

"John Sharp?" he asked.

"That's right, sir," I said. "I tried to make it by ten o'clock on the head."

He looked at his wrist watch and smiled.

"Perfect timing," he said. "Come in. I'll try to take as little of your time as is possible."

That was welcome news. It branded him as a gentleman. Most of the fea-

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ture stuff we picked up had to be gathered after long arguments and cut to pieces before publication.

The laboratory wasn't much. It contained a few benches, dozens of test tubes and several machines arranged along the inside wall. They made no sense to me—at the time.

We found a couple of tall, uncomfortable benches near a table. I put my hat over a test tube rack and we sat down. For some time Crocket continued to stare at me. It gave me time to size him up as a human being. I knew he was wondering just how to approach me. His hands, though strong and firm, made little fluttering motions on the rough table top. At last he looked at me full in the face and treated me with one of the most friendly smiles I've ever seen.

"I think," he said, "that I'll tell you the whole story and let you use your own judgment."

Somehow it sounded very flattering, as though he saw something in me that prompted his trust.

"Thanks," I said. "Knowing nothing of what you plan to tell, I can't promise that I'll merit your faith in me."

HE ROSE and went to a steel filing cabinet. He came back and dropped a sheaf of papers on the table before me.

"When I've finished, I want you to take this file with you. Read it carefully and don't pass judgment on what I have to say before you've had a night to sleep on it."

This, I thought, is rapidly growing into something big. Bigger, perhaps, than I can handle.

"To begin with," Crocket went on, "forget everything you ever knew or think you knew about yourself and the world you live in."

JOHNNY SHARP

That was a pretty big order. I waited.

"The world is an experiment," he said. "A cold blooded, scientific experiment."

"I can understand that." I smiled. "There's nothing very settled about this world or life on it."

Crocket's expression changed. He ignored my remark. His eyes flashed with sudden fire. He leaned forward, his hands on the table, head bent forward toward me.

"Wait," he said, and his voice sank to a whisper. "Don't comment lightly on what I'm about to say. You, like the others, do not understand. I think that if you listen closely, you may be able to digest more than the average person."

Another left-handed compliment to my appearance. I was secretly pleased.

"We have always been taught that the world, *our* world, is a sort of su-

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perior sphere, blessed with many things all for the comfort of man, the almighty creature."

I had to admit that the human animal usually saw things in a light of their benefit to himself. Crocket was talking swiftly now.

"We have tried for centuries to unravel the mystery of our past. We have sought secret meanings from remote ruins of the jungles. We have excavated lost cities, argued over them and rebuilt them. Each time, we try to explain our presence here as being a great improvement upon the past. We are perfect, we think, having built up gradually from weaker people of weaker worlds."

"Wait," I protested. "I'll admit that it's been pretty much of a shot in the dark, but surely scientists are getting *somewhere?*"

"Hear me through," he begged. "We have our pyramids, our snake gods, our Atlantis, and the countless other bits of a huge puzzle that we try year after year to fit together. We search for missing links, and new wonders. For keystones to turn in the lock of time and bring back a complete story of the past. Why? To explain to ourselves where we came from and satisfy our minds that we are justified in having the terrific power that we have been blessed with."

I could understand what he was getting at. I had often thought that if man would look more to the future and less to the past, we would not be encumbered so much by ancient history and could go forward to bigger victories in the future.

"I'll admit that ancient history is somewhat of a puzzle," I said.

Crocket nodded. It was an automatic movement, as though his mind heard me and his ears didn't.

"A puzzle that will never be complete," he said.

He startled me. What was on this man's mind? I had to get to the bottom of this at once. I didn't have to ask. He exploded his bombshell.

"Actually there is no puzzle," he said. "It is man-made and created in our own warped, environment-controlled minds."

He had managed to stir me deeply. Something told me that he was both sane and very clever. He believed what he said, but just what was he trying to say?

"The world is an experiment," he went on. "Otherwise, how do you explain that in every case of exploration, with books or actual ruins, we come, sooner of later, to a blank wall. Men have dreamed of Atlantis and never turned the key in its door. They have found clues to ruins of so many and varied types of civilization that they cannot probe deeply into any of them. If the unexplained secrets of the world were put into books, it would take centuries to unravel and isolate a few facts. Then we would only be on the outskirts of the real problem."

"And if we did unravel them," I asked with sudden spirit, "where would we be?"

He shook his head quickly and I saw that he was pleased.

"Exactly," he said. "Why not look to the future? Environment holds us down with chains of the past. We mutter darkly about lost races—hidden civilizations as powerful as our own. We worry about the missing links.

"If we solved every problem, what would we have? A few more libraries of ancient history. Yet, if we could turn to the future, forget our environment and practice with that same untiring effort to improve ourselves, some real good might eventually come out of our race."

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I'M NOT a scientist. My imagination is limited by meeting a certain quota of headlines every day. Yet, his argument sounded convincing.

"Just what is *your* explanation?" I asked.

"Simply stated, it is this," he said. He used his words carefully, spacing them, not so much to gain effect, but to keep his own mind clear. "The earth was placed here at a very recent date. It was set in motion with a number of people upon it."

"Inconceivable," I said. "Remember that you can't explain away what is in rock. That you can't burn the books that have lived for us. That we have ancestors to remember."

"You manufacture synthetic materials in a laboratory, don't you?" His voice was as cold as ice.

I nodded.

"Then consider a vast civilization, advanced millions of years beyond our own. Imagine the workmen of this civilization making in their huge laboratories a synthetic world. Perhaps this globe is small. We have nothing for a comparison. Now, just as a relief map is made, these men of science built up a world, layer upon layer. They put on it all the things we have grubbed for and brought to light. They have placed in our minds the belief that we could remember things that we cannot actually remember. They gave us a complete history.

"Actually, none of these things are true. We think we remember our childhood, our ancestors. We believe we are being clever to dig up bits of our puzzle and analyze them.

"But here is the perfect explanation. The *only* thing that will explain why we are constantly faced with bits of the puzzle of life that cannot be assembled.

"There is no puzzle at all."

I shook my head.

"Sorry," I said. "You are sincere. I believe that, or I wouldn't listen to you. Yet, you can't explain away the facts we are sure of. The idea doesn't ring true."

He wasn't angry. He looked discouraged, but unbeaten.

"What do you know about the pyramids?" he asked.

"Why," I hesitated, "they were built as burial places for the Pharaohs back in—I think it was 3200 B.C. They . . ."

He nodded.

"I know the common conception of their origin," he said, "yet, as with other discoveries, has man even been able to explain them to his full satisfaction? Has man ever been able to explain *any* of the world's wonders in a way that *everyone* could understand?"

I shook my head.

"And if man succeeded in doing so, would it make any difference to the worker who struggles for his daily bread? Would it conceivably improve his future?"

I grinned.

"It would make damned fine headlines," I said.

That brought the first smile I'd seen in half an hour.

"Headlines," he repeated softly. "Think what startling headlines I could make if I could only prove . . ."

He shook his head.

"I cannot expect you to believe everything I have told you," he said, "but, you came for a story. Print it in the Sunday Supplement, with your articles about wives who have five husbands and babies who are controlled by ghostly hands. Print it and let them laugh at it. I'll have one consolation. I've *tried* to get my idea across, and though I have failed before I start, I'll know that I'm right."

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I FOUND my pencil and a notebook. I turned an eighth of an inch of lead out of my Eversharp and waited.

"The world has no past." He talked smoothly now, as though reciting a lesson he knew well. "Perhaps ten or even twenty years ago the world was tossed into space from a planet far advanced in its thinking. It hung there in void and started to spin. It was a model, made of substances that can be combined in any laboratory. On it were the false remains of puzzles that no man will ever solve. Man and woman were placed on its surface, and into their minds, false memories were placed.

"These men and women were *given* memories. Memories that told them *they* were all powerful. Memories that made them think they had a past. They were given books, homes and material things. Their bogus memories told them that *they* had been responsible for history.

"All this was done to find out if man would fit into his environment and struggle with the unsolved puzzle, or if they would rise above this, and see that a huge hoax had been perpetrated against them. Would they fight to free themselves of the bonds that had been placed upon them?"

"But why," I interrupted desperately. "If it were possible, what would it all net the power that put us here. What is the end of the plan?"

He sighed.

"If I knew," he said, "I for one would escape before it is too late. I would take those with me who have the intellect and foresight to understand me."

He shrugged.

"For those without the blessing of imagination, I could do nothing."

He stopped talking. The room was deathly still. The sun came in, sending shafts of light across the desk over my cramped writing fingers. The light startled me and brought me back to the present. I stared around at the clean, barren room.

"Then according to your theory," I said, "none of this was built or conceived by you and me. It was prepared for us and we were tossed into it like animals into a cage, to see if we could find a way out."

He nodded.

I stood up, shook hands with him and put on my hat.

"I'll print it," I said. "It will make a sensational story. I can't promise that it won't hold you up to criticism."

He smiled. I knew that he was smiling at me and not with me. He held the same respect for me as he did the remainder of the people on earth.

"Take the papers," he said. "Today is Friday. You don't have to write your story until tomorrow. Make me one promise. Read this entire file and then use your own judgment. I won't expect more than fair treatment."

I took the papers and put them into my brief case. He escorted me to the door. Once out in the sun, the full power of my imagination started to play hell with me. There's something about the enormous strength of the subconscious mind. Where the ordinary, everyday thoughts leave off, the subconscious mind takes over. It won't listen to reason, that is, not everyday reasoning. It fights its way ahead, ignoring the narrowness of the body it is contained in.

By the time I hailed another cab and was on my way back to town, I was a mental wreck. I knew Crocket's story *couldn't* be true. A lot of people have expressed odd theories. You can't believe them, but just try to toss them aside, and bingo, they hit you like a ton of lead.

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BY the time I reached the *Express* Building, I was shaking from head to foot. I half expected to see some huge, all-enveloping eye staring down at me from the sky. I went in, fought off the temptation to tear Professor Crocket's papers from the brief case and start reading them, and finally decided to call Ann.

She was waiting for me at her office. Ann is a dress designer, and a damn good one. She's a real pal too, but Ann wouldn't be in a mood to listen to what I had to say right now.

Her voice was warm and eager when I reached her.

"You've been a very poor luncheon date, darling," she scolded. "You're an hour late now."

Startled, I glanced at my watch. More time had been consumed with Crocket than I had ever dreamed. I apologized and we talked for a while about pleasant things. A home, a garden, all of which Crocket wouldn't have been much interested in. Then, when I should have rushed to her office and taken her out for an extra large steak, I did a strange thing.

"I'm sorry about lunch, Ann," I said.

"It's never too late," she reminded me. "I'm still hungry *and* unfed."

I felt miserable, but my brief-case was open on the desk and Crocket's file stuck half-way out of it.

"Larry Keen left last night," I said, "and his desk is piled up with details. I'll have to forget the pleasure of eating with the world's sweetest woman, and work right through until tonight."

Her words didn't betray the disappointment that was evident in her voice.

"Then tonight, perhaps?" It was almost a challenge. "Dinner at the Wentworth and a show afterward? If you're broke. . . . ?"

I felt like a heel.

"Tonight, at eight," I promised.

PROFESSOR CROCKET

"And I'm *not* broke. If you don't cut out . . .!"

She laughed and everything was all right again.

"I guess being a business woman isn't good for me," she said. "I'm so independent with money that I forget my sweetheart still has pride."

We hung up soon after that and I plunged into the file of Professor Crocket's papers.

It was twelve long hours later when I put the last well thumbed sheet down again. Twelve hours filled with emotions that I had never thought to face. The *Express* was alive and humming as usual. However, to me the building had lost its life. It was a dead, sterile monument, placed here by *something* and given a background and history by a power greater than the world. *Greater than the ant who calls himself man.*

Emotionally, I was a wreck. Pro-

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fessor Crocket had won a follower and Larry Keen had lost a damned good reporter. From now on my stuff would have a different color. The color of a synthetic, test tube world, in which man continually fights to establish himself and solve an impossible riddle.

CHAPTER III

After Effects

"I am very poorly today, and very stupid, and hate everybody and everything. One lives only to make blunders."—Charles Darwin.

I MUST have been in a trance, as I remember little of leaving the *Express* Building and arriving at my room with the portable typewriter in one hand and James Crocket's file of papers in the other. I do recall Mrs. White, my landlady, bringing up a pot of coffee, as she always did when my typewriter clicked into the wee hours. Then the phone rang and I was suddenly pulled from my work by the scruff of my neck, remembering that Ann and I had a dinner and show date. I looked at my watch. It was midnight. I hated to answer the phone, but knew it would only make matters worse. Ann knew my habits well. She should have. We planned to get married in the Spring.

I picked up the phone and said, "Hello."

"For Heaven's sake, *Mr.* Sharp." It was Ann all right. Her voice wasn't very pleasant. "Are you going to make a habit of standing me up?"

I stammered a poor explanation, and I'm sure Ann must have got the impression that the papers I was working on had priority over everything else in the world. When I finished, I still had said very little. Perhaps I could explain later. To try now would be a hopeless task.

"It didn't matter very much anyhow." The way she said it, I knew it mattered *very* much. "As it turned out, I didn't suffer."

A pang of something akin to jealousy shot through me. I'm afraid I let my voice grow a little cool.

"Just what do you mean by that?"

She laughed and it had an unpleasant, almost triumphant quality.

"Have you ever seen the lobby of the Wentworth after eight in the evening?"

The question wasn't necessary. We had both eaten there often.

"I have," I said bluntly.

"Well, it's loaded with sailors and soldiers. Some of them are officers, and *very* intelligent men."

I should have kept my mouth shut. Suddenly I saw red.

"And I suppose *you* looked very lonely and sweet?"

Ann was enjoying herself, or pretending to. I wasn't sure which.

"After all I *had* been stood up twice in the same day," she said, and there was a pout in her voice. "His name is Jerald Connover, and he's a lieutenant. It was quite harmless, the dinner and the dancing."

"Quite," I said savagely, and hung up. I was bitter and so damned mad I couldn't think straight.

Suddenly I hated everything, everyone. I hated the world and the smug little people on it. I hated Lieutenant Jerry Connover for taking my girl out to a dance.

It was in that mood, distrusting the world and the people in it that I sat down to write Professor James Crocket's exposé of a bogus, ersatz world. The phone tried to interrupt me three times after that, but I ignored it, taking a certain delight in returning some of the bitter tea Ann had made me

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drink. In my mind, although I could offer her no explanation, I was justified in forgetting her. Never had anything shocked me so much, and I knew that never again would I be so deeply moved as I was that night.

I didn't stop writing until nine o'clock Saturday morning. The room was cluttered with balls of tightly wadded paper that I had torn from the portable and tossed around me. Cigarette stubs littered the dresser, the rug and even the bed. My coat and hat were on the floor where I dropped them as I came in.

Mrs. White came in at nine, after knocking timidly. She gasped with horror as she saw the mess.

"Mr. Sharp," she was instantly worried over my health. "Coffee, all over your shirt. Are you ill?"

I stood up unsteadily while she rushed to the window and threw it up. I motioned toward the untidy stack of stuff that I had written.

"Sick to death," I confessed. "Sick of men and the world in general."

I TURNED away from her and went into the bathroom. I knew I had to take a shower and awaken myself enough to make the trip to the office. When I came out, I felt as I imagine a man might who has been run over by a steam roller and straightened out again by a blacksmith's hammer. At least I had put on a fresh shirt and taken a shower.

Mrs. White was gone, but the neatness of her was reflected by the missing cigarette stubs, the loss of the empty coffee pot and the sun that streamed into the room, desperately fighting the acrid fumes of dead cigarette smoke.

I managed to stay on my feet long enough to deliver my story to Reed and tell him to run it in place of the *Fish and Fowl* article. Reed is a smart little guy who recognizes sensational stuff when he sees it. He read two paragraphs and looked interested.

"Lot of screwball junk that our fourteen year old readers will swallow in a gulp, huh?"

I nodded, too exhausted to explain.

"Run it in two installments," I said. "It'll sell extra copies next Sunday if you plug it."

Somehow I managed to find my way back to the boarding house. The room smelled fresh, and Mrs. White had been up again to straighten up the bed. It wasn't necessary. I remember taking off my hat, sitting down on the edge of the bed to fumble with my shoe laces. That was all.

When I awakened, sun was streaming through the curtains. My suitcoat was arranged neatly over the back of a chair. My shoes were under the bed, and I knew that the mothering spirit of Mrs. White had been on duty once more. I turned over carefully, experimenting with each muscle and decided finally that I would be able to move once more. I had that terrible coffee and cigarette taste that develops when a man's stomach is allowed to repose on the same level with his head for several hours.

Up to now, I hadn't thought of anything important except that I was awake and wasn't sure I liked it. Then my eyes lighted on the neat stack of Crocket's papers on top of the dresser. My typewriter was there also, and half a pack of cigarette.

Professor Crocket's Papers.

Damn it. Forever after that I was to connect a very special group of emotions to living every time I saw or thought of Crocket. Right now, I wasn't sure of myself. I felt as though I had taken a huge bite of some strange new food, was unable to spit it out, and

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as yet wasn't sure that I wanted to eat it.

That, perhaps, was as close as I would ever come to understanding the strange man and his work.

I found the bath room unoccupied and spent twenty minutes soaking under the shower. After that I felt much better. I shaved carefully, knowing that it must be Sunday, and returned to my room. The clock in the hall pointed to two-thirty.

I dressed, hesitated over calling Ann and decided against it. I was still strangely angry about what had happened, although I wasn't sure which of us had the best excuse for being upset.

Quite often on Sunday afternoon, I wander into the *Express* office and spend an hour or two gabbing with the boys. It acts as sort of a club meeting because none of us have a great deal of time to talk about anything during the remainder of the week.

I went downstairs, into the sunlight of Bracey Street, and wandered slowly toward the park at the end of the block. A yellow cab swung out of the park and I hailed it. The driver pushed the door open. He didn't look very happy. I assumed that someone had made him drive them all over town, and he was angry at having to go so far from the center of town. Drivers are like that, most of the time. They make more money on a number of short trips.

I got in and leaned back, trying to review at long distance, the emotions that had poured through me while I wrote the "Papers of Professor Crocket." The theory still hit me like a ton of bricks. It was impossible to take a calm, third person look at my thoughts.

The driver caught my eye in the rear view mirror. Finally he spoke:

"You read the papers today?"

I shook my head.

"Been sleeping overtime," I said. "What are the Russians doing to the supermen?"

He shook his head.

"Plenty," he said, but that wasn't what he had on his mind.

"Say," he went on, after a minute's hesitation, "what you think about this world. It's anchored pretty tight, ain't it?"

I DIDN'T understand. I said so. He actually blushed.

"I mean, well, there ain't no danger of us sorta getting all tangled up in our environment, whatever that is, and falling and breaking our damned heads, is there?"

I was beginning to see the light. I was understanding, through my first contact with the world since Saturday, that my article had caused some excitement.

"If you mean the end of the world, I don't think you have to worry," I said. "I guess we're safe enough."

I saw a smile come over his face. His chin relaxed and he grinned.

"Some God-damned screwball on the *Express,*" he said, "is saying that we're done, all washed up. 'Lay down, brother,' this guy says, 'you're dead.' "

I tried to keep my voice as calm as possible. I hadn't dreamed that my article would produce *this* effect.

"What—what sort of a story is it?" I asked. "Who wrote it?"

The cab driver shook his head.

"Some half-baked ninny named John Sharp," he said, and there was a hint of anger in his voice. "The *Express* calls it 'The Papers of Professor Crocket.' "

"Oh," I said, and shut up. My face was red. It *felt* red, though I couldn't actually see it. I don't know at that moment whether I was ashamed or just plain frightened. I knew that if a

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cabby; driving around the park had been so strangely stirred, what the effect would be on the middle class, to whom most copies of the *Express* were peddled.

"Anyhow," the driver added, "I don't know much about law, and stuff. If this guy Crocket can be sued, they oughta take him for everything he's got. A guy ain't got no business scaring people like that. It—it ain't moral."

He had spoken his piece and he felt better. We were in front of the *Express* building now. I jumped out, paid my fare and almost ran toward the door. I was so excited that I forgot to tip him.

CHAPTER IV

I Lose a Good Job

THE news room was humming with activity. For that place to buzz on Sunday was a miracle. The Monday editions went to bed late. We all stalled for as long as we could, evading until the last minute, the business of starting a new week.

But this was different. *How different I realized the moment I poked my head in the door.*

Larry Keen was back. He sat with his head resting cupped on his hands, his telephone removed from its cradle.

I heard the undercurrent of voices as I went in. Larry sensed the change and looked up. He saw me and his face was gray, dispirited. He looked as though he'd been dragged through a heavy fog and absorbed it into his complexion. His eyes met mine and wavered.

"Johnny!"

That was all he said, but it was enough. I've known Larry a long time. He had never acted like this before. I went over to his desk and sat on the edge of it. I took one of his cigarettes from the tin of flat-fifties.

"What brought you back?" I asked.

It wasn't necessary. I think I knew.

"You guess," he suggested.

The room was deathly silent now. A couple of the new boys hung around. The older men drifted out, in respect to me.

"The article?"

He nodded and didn't say anything at once.

After a while, he said:

"Johnny, why did you do it?"

I was beginning to resent what was happening. I hadn't rested long enough yet and a lot of things were still mixed up in my brain. One thing, I was sure of. In spite of how I hated to hurt Larry, I knew in my heart that I was right. Larry had meant for me to treat the Crocket article with my tongue in my cheek. I had written what I *had* to write, a sincere explanation of Crocket's research, and a firm argument in his defense.

"Look here, Larry," I said, "you told me to use my own judgment. I did."

To my surprise, he didn't blow up. He continued to stare at me and his eyes were red.

"You probably *thought* you were sincere," he said. "Now look at my side of it. I was enjoying myself up at Lake Weller. The fish were biting and the paper was all set to take care of itself. This morning, I get a wire from Johnson . . ."

"Johnson?" I interrupted. "He didn't . . . ?"

Oland Johnson owns the biggest share of the *Express*.

Larry nodded.

"He's up in that air to stay," he said. "Gave me hell for letting you go ahead when I was away."

"I'm sorry, Larry," I said. "I should not have done it, not until you got back."

He grinned, but it wasn't a very

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happy expression.

"Forget that part of it," he said. "Johnny, why did you do it? Why did you get taken in by some crack-pot professor?"

"But he isn't," I protested. "Crocket's right. He has firmly convinced me. After checking on his research, there can be no doubt."

He made an impatient motion with his hand.

"Forget it," he said. "I read the article. With your name on it, it's dynamite. Look here, Johnny, you've been under my wing for ten years. You've developed into the best man I have, and because of it, I give you a lot of privileges. This time . . ."

"I've stepped out of bounds," I said.

He nodded.

"You understand, don't you, that it's not me who has the final word? You've attracted the attention of the big boss, and I'm only his stooge."

I nodded. I felt too low to talk. No use pretending that the *Express* wasn't a part of me. Being fired was no fun.

I reached for Larry Keen's hand and we shook.

"No hard feelings?" he asked.

"None."

He stood up.

"Hell," he said. "Let's go out and get drunk."

WE SAT alone in Brett's Bar, a popular little place that leans against the right side of the *Express* Building. It was four o'clock. For the past two hours I had been trying to convince Larry that Crocket was right. I insisted that my article was based on facts as reliable as any scientist had been able to present.

We were both mellowed by several scotch and sodas. I was making headway, in spite of Keen's hard headed, everyday news views.

"But you can't say that he's absolutely right any more than you can say that the others are wrong. There's no way of proving definitely that Crocket is on the right road. If I can depend on what you've said, the world won't end or anything of that sort."

I thought I understood Crocket's mind pretty well, considering the short time I had known the Professor.

"No," I admitted. "But, it's the environment business again. We'll go on fighting, not forward, but backward. When we should be planning for tomorrow and building up new plans, we continue trying to reconstruct our past. We are tied to the past.

"Take war for example."

I was warming to the subject. It was like a spark that grew and grew inside me until my whole mind was on fire.

"We fight a war. Someone who thinks more clearly than most of us says: 'Why are we fighting? What's the object?' The answer is, there have always been wars and we have always fought, from the beginning of time. That we can't escape war.

"That's only one point. Hundreds of men with brilliant minds spend their entire lives digging into the past. Why not forget that past? A past we never had. Why not devote more time to perfecting the thing we have and forgetting the ape and the fish we were supposed to have been at some murky uncertain time in the past?"

"Then Crocket's theory is, that we are living under a curse?" Larry added. "A curse that was passed to us by some race of super-men on another planet? That we haven't any past? That our books, our memories, even everyday things are bogus? That they were manufactured and placed here to confuse us?"

I nodded.

"Confuse all but those who have the

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sense to realize that this tangled, patchwork past means nothing. That it can never lead us anywhere but to further misery and uncertainty. Our minds are all tied up in dusty books and dustier memories. They are entombed in the very ruins that we dig from the earth."

Larry chuckled. The Scotch was good. It made my head lighter and the room, warm and friendly. Brett, the proprietor of the bar, set up drinks on the house. He leaned back once more to listen to us. His small, red eye had never left my face since Larry and I started to talk.

Larry tossed off his drink and stood up.

"It's unfortunate that you can't talk to each subscriber of the *Express*," he said. "You might convince them."

He hesitated, staring at me.

"*Just as you've convinced me*," he added.

Brett cleared his throat and leaned over the bar.

"And me too," he said in a strangely moved voice. "If I tried to preach that stuff over the bar, my customers would throw me out. But, Mr. Sharp, if you need a few bucks to get by on, let me know. Tell that Crocket guy that I'm on his side. I'm gonna forget all about the past and start looking ahead."

"Suppose you could forget the bill?" Larry suggested.

Brett grinned.

"That ain't far enough in the past for me to forget," he said. "But the drinks are on me—today.

"If you don't get another job pretty soon, Mr. Sharp, come around. There's always pretzels and sandwiches here."

I assured him solemnly that I would, and we left.

Larry hesitated on the sidewalk.

"Where are you going now," he asked? It felt nice to have him worrying about me.

"I've got to take Crocket's stuff back to him," I said.

"Stop at the office tomorrow," Larry said. "I'm going to talk with Johnson again."

"Don't do it," I begged. "It's only hurting you. Johnson's sore at me. There's no sense to your getting on the wrong side of him."

"I'm going to talk to him," he said. "S'long."

"S'long," I said, and wandered up the street. I turned around when I reached the corner and stared at the rough, dirty front of the *Daily Express* Building. The trucks were beginning to move out with the morning edition. The sun was low and it hurt my eyes. I rubbed them with the back of my hand and plunged blindly away toward home.

CHAPTER V

Ann Explains

GOOD Lord, how it grew. The momentum of it was slow at first, like a well formed sphere of snow starting down a long hill. At first the kernel of the idea was clear. Then, gradually, as people of all types applied their own meaning to the story, the thing became wild and uncertain. The sphere rolled faster and faster, gathering in size and growing hazy with the many interpretations applied to it.

I felt it, late in the afternoon, downtown. The Movie-News had recognized the story's value and tossed together a film on the subject. It was advertised all the way across the side of the *Movie-News* Building.

"EXPRESS PRINTS DARING STORY

Come In and See the Film That Will End Your Doubts

I read that the film was accompanied by Hanz Kalterburn's voice and that

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the charge for the show was twenty-five cents.

I paid my quarter and heard Kalterburn's voice before my eyes adjusted themselves to the darkened theatre.

"The idea is utterly fantastic. Men in high places have for centuries explored and re-explored our wonderful world. Every ruin tells a story. Every book gives us a picture of the past or the present. To arouse such doubts in the minds of our people in time of war is sabotage."

For a miserable half hour I watched bits of old exploration films the *Movie-News* people had been able to assemble. The pyramids, the lost cities of the Aztecs, the Pueblos of the Southwest. Kalterburn's voice pursued me through it all.

"You see with your eyes, material things that this man says do not exist."

Crocket had said no such things. He had not denied that the ruins were there; that the books were in print. He had simply denied that they meant what they seemed to mean.

"The reporter who covered this story and the paper that allowed it to go to press should be ousted from the Association. Such men are winning the war for the enemy."

The film ended. Some of the people who saw it shouted and stomped their feet. The lights came on. Others sat very still, their faces deathly calm, as though they were trying to think for themselves. I stood up and left. Behind me, the blare of military music filled the theatre. Another film, the story of MacArthur came on to the screen.

I wasn't trying to sabotage the war effort. I wanted America to win, with every bone in my body. I had written dozens of powerful stories about the war. I had been congratulated on doing a good job. Now this one article had hit me below the belt. The city, perhaps the world, was against me.

I couldn't escape.

The moving lights on the *Evening Mirror* Building flashed above the Square. The lights spelled out news-leads to advertise the *Mirror*. The *Mirror* hated Oland Johnson and the *Express*.

I watched as the sign flashed out its message. Others watched also. People jostled me, but I stood there looking up.

"NEWS ISN'T NEWS WITH *EXPRESS*—PAPER PRINTS WILD STORY — FABRICATED FROM STAR DUST AND IMAGINATION — PLAYS ON IMAGINATION WITH SENSATIONAL LIE"

I doubled my fists and moved into the early theatre crowds along the street. Everyone was talking. Papers were a sell-out. Everyone expected more comment. They got it. I bought a copy of the *Mirror*.

Every columnist in that tabloid was out for the blue-blooded *Express*. The front page was covered by a huge picture of the pyramids. The headline was simple and a masterpiece.

"ARE THE PYRAMIDS AN OPTICAL ILLUSION?"

I crumpled the paper and dropped it on the sidewalk.

I went home.

PERHAPS I should have called Ann Shelton. Usually I could have found comfort in her voice because she could straighten me out faster than anyone I knew. It wasn't any use. Yesterday I had acted like a fool and I knew it. I envied Lieutenant Jerry Conover. Dinner at the Wentworth and dancing afterward. I wondered bitterly if the Lieutenant could dance. I'm a flop at it. Perhaps they had made another

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date for tonight.

I flopped down on the bed. The phone rang, but I couldn't find the courage to answer it. Mrs. White usually came up in the evening and talked over any stories that carried my by-line. She was white headed and a sweet old lady. She seemed almost like a mother to me. Tonight she didn't come. Probably thought I was out, I tried to tell myself. Still, my light was on and she could see it from her room.

The phone rang again at nine o'clock, but I was undressed then, staring up at the ceiling and trying to go to sleep.

Then I was dreaming about a huge ape that flung himself down at me from the top of a vine covered tree of the past. The ape stood on the bed grinning at me.

"I'm your great, great, great, great great grandfather and then some," he said. "Remember me?"

"Go away," I pleaded. "You don't exist."

He got a hold on my arm and twisted it back until perspiration stood out on my face.

"Try to explain that away," he said. *"You can't get rid of me. You can't throw away the past."*

It was as though I was coming out from under ether. Bells were ringing and they slowly turned into voices.

"The past—You can't throw away the past—past—past—past— . . . "

Then I was awake. My arm ached because I was laying on it. I heard the voice again, Mrs. White's voice.

"Past dinner time, Mr. Sharp. I saved something for you. You didn't come down . . . "

I felt all choked up inside, but I was glad that she had awakened me.

"I—I'm not feeling very well," I said. "Went to bed early. Thanks for thinking of me."

"You're sure you won't eat some toast, if I bring it up?"

ANN SHELTON

She sounded very sad.

"No thanks," I managed.

I heard her footsteps die in the hall. It was very quiet outside. It's always like that on Sunday night. People are tired out, gathering strength to fight the new week. I didn't have any fight left in me.

Larry Keen was on the phone.

"Dammit, Johnny," he sounded angry. "Just because you're on the spot you haven't any right to ignore Ann. She's been a peach. Why don't you call her. She's going crazy."

I tried to sound cold and disinterested.

"I don't think she's interested in what I'm doing," I said.

He fairly exploded.

"Don't be a ten-year-old," he snapped. "Ann told me that story of the Lieutenant. She thought you'd

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take it as a joke. There isn't any Lieutenant. She felt badly when you didn't show up. She invented the 'other man' to tease you and you swallowed it like a puppy swallows marbles. Get wise to yourself, will you?"

Before I could answer, he added:

"She tried to call you several times and you weren't in. She got frightened and contacted me."

Larry, Ann and myself were together most of the time. He was like an older brother to her. She went to him when she thought I needed more help than she could give me.

"I guess I've made a fool of myself," I admitted. "I was tired out and the Lieutenant story sounded like the real thing."

"Forget it," he advised. "Call Ann. I'm still working on Johnson, but I'm not getting very far."

"Larry—you shouldn't . . . "

I stopped. He had hung up.

I HAD been awakened by the phone. It was Monday, the first working day of the week, and I had no job. I started to dress, but I felt so darned good about the non-existent Lieutenant that I couldn't wait to call Ann. I picked up the phone.

"Parkway 3224," I said.

In a minute Ann's warm eager voice greeted me.

"Johnny?"

"I was wondering what you were doing for lunch," I said. "Just in case you feel like taking another chance with a heel."

Her voice broke and I knew she was trying to keep from crying.

"Johnny," she said. "You poor darned fool, you, you . . . I'm waiting for you. You didn't think . . . ?"

"I thought I was God Almighty himself for a couple of days," I said, "but a few other people have ideas too and they have knocked me off my self-made throne."

"I want to talk about that," she said. "But first, please come down right away. I can eat a second breakfast. Besides, it's after nine. I'm getting hungry."

"So am I," I said, "to see you again. I'm on my way."

That was the shortest shower I ever took. I was dressed and in a cab before the clock passed the fifteen minute mark. Ann is no dunce. You might get the idea that because she likes to have *me* around, that her I.Q. wasn't so high. I was just one of her weaker moments. Otherwise, Ann was twenty-five, very cool and pretty in her gray suits and she had a remarkable brain.

She had used that brain. In five years she had built a business around her ability to design clothing and sold her designs to the best tailors in the country. Paris will come to Ann for dresses eventually and be glad to get them.

Her office was small and tastefully decorated. Ann was standing behind her desk, her finger tips on the glass top, waiting for me as I came in. I felt like a kid who comes home after running away to seek new adventures.

"Gosh," I said. "You look good."

I never think very clearly when I'm with her.

She came around the desk and I acted more like an octopus than a man. Her hair smelled sweet when she pressed her face against mine. Her lips were made up in perfect cupid bows, but I put an end to that. She struggled weakly for air, and when I saw she was smothering, I let her escape to arms length.

"That was for the lieutenant," I said. "May he never do so well."

Ann blushed.

"I didn't really . . ."

"I know," I said hurriedly. "Larry

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called me. I've been a jealous dope."

She smiled.

"Maybe I like you that way," she said. "At least you cared enough to be angry."

"It wasn't that." I remembered Crocket and the trouble he'd sent my way. "It was the story I was working on."

Her eyes clouded. She returned to the desk and sat down. I followed her and sat on the wide window sill looking down on the busy street.

"I read the story," she said, and her voice was low. "Johnny, didn't we have an understanding?"

I nodded. She meant this business of me rushing off, half crocked, and making a fool of myself. This wasn't the first time. I was always writing something that turned out to be dynamite. I had lost several chances for promotion.

"I guess I really took care of the wedding date this time," I said. I had a lump in my throat that I couldn't swallow. I felt foolish.

"DID you have to do it?" she asked, then before I could speak, she smiled again and it was like the sun coming out. "I guess you did," she confessed. "Poor Johnny. You have to champion some sort of cause or you aren't happy."

She reached up and stroked my forehead. I know how good a dog feels when you pet him. Her fingers were cool and soft on my face.

"I know I'm a damn fool," I said, "but Crocket's a swell person. The least I could do was write something that wouldn't make people laugh at him."

"But *that* article." She shivered. "You don't actually believe what you said."

I felt my chin growing stiff. With anyone but Ann, I'd have had a fight on my hands in two minutes.

"I believe every word of it," I said. "And there's another installment that is more startling—believe me—than the first."

"It won't be printed, will it?" she asked.

"Not in the *Express*," I said. "Johnson and his customers have taken care of that."

She shook her head rather doubtfully.

"The things you said give me the creeps," she admitted. "You can hardly expect me to feel good about the thing that lost you a job."

We were waiting for one more raise. I had refused to accept her money and now it looked as though another year or two lay between us and the cottage on the hill.

"I'll get something right away," I promised. "There are always better jobs if you look around hard enough for them."

"Not with Larry for a boss, and the *Express* to hold you up. You hated to leave, didn't you?"

There was no point in hiding the truth from her.

"Next to losing you," I admitted, "it was the hardest thing I ever did. They gave me a couple of shots in the arm once, and they used printer's ink instead of blood. It's better than blood for me."

It wasn't any good going on like this and we both knew it.

"Let's eat." She tried to act bright and happy once more, but I could see the worry-lines on her forehead. "I had a single egg for breakfast and it's strength is wearing off."

I kissed some more of her lipstick off and she applied fresh make-up. We went downstairs and ate in the grill-room.

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CHAPTER VI

A New and Bigger Job

I HAD the odd feeling that I was returning to the scene of a crime. Pinecrest University looked just as calm and pine hidden as it had when I visited it the first time. That's where I was wrong. Pinecrest could stand the charge of dynamite that Crocket had set off. The college had been there for half a century and it took more than Crocket to move it from the map.

Pinecrest didn't ignore James Crocket, however. It removed him to save its own reputation. That, I am told, is known as "saving face."

I found my way to the weather beaten building that housed Crocket's laboratory. I knocked and he came to the door. To my surprise, he looked quite happy and contented with the world. You'd never have guessed that he had just returned from a long and unhappy grilling before the Board of Directors.

"Come in, Mr. Sharp." He shook my hand hard with enthusiasm. "It seems that you decided in my favor. I'm afraid we've exploded something powerful under the noses of some important people."

I agreed that we had and found myself in the sun-lighted lab once more. I waited for him to lock up the papers I had returned.

I was going to tell him about the greeting I had received at the *Express*. I didn't have to. He went to the window and stared out for a long time. He came back and his face was sober.

"It's going to be hard to leave Pinecrest," he said. "I lived and loved it here for many years."

"They evidently gave you the same treatment I received," I said.

He nodded.

"I'm accused of preparing sensational drivel that will undermine the reputation of these fine halls of learning," he said. "It didn't come as much of a shock. I spoke, not entirely willingly, to Oland Johnson of your paper. He insisted on immediate action and sat in on the hearing himself. Mr. Johnson informed me that you have also, as he termed it, been 'given the gate.'"

"For keeps," I said. "We are now two men without a country."

His eyes grew stern and uncompromising.

"Not entirely," he said. "Fortunately, the press, although not entirely free, has done a fine job for us. We have come a long distance toward awakening the imaginations of the people."

I was puzzled by his reference to "we," as though he considered us partners.

"I'm glad, somehow," I said, "that I did a good job. That is, I guess the job must have been good to get such speedy results."

He smiled openly.

"You are my first convert," he said. "I'm thankful that I gave my papers to a man who understands them. I took that chance."

"And now we can both go on relief and spend our time digging, even though it probably won't be for ruins," I said.

Crocket chuckled.

"I think not," he said. "That is, not if you'll listen to my proposition."

This was the second time he had linked us together. Frankly, I was curious. I had fought for him and his theory. I wanted to be in on the finish. I knew that Ann didn't approve of him. She had said as much. Yet, I admired him greatly and felt that we were destined to be close to each other. I didn't have to question him as he vol-

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unteered information.

"I have a comfortable cottage on Lake Speer, Minnesota," he said. "It's an out of the way place. I planned, some day, to present my work to the world. I knew when that time came, I'd have to leave here. I made a home for myself at the lake. I'm not a rich man, but I have a few thousand dollars in the bank. I also have a complete laboratory and some highly complicated machinery at the lake."

He paused to catch his breath. He spoke now with the eagerness of a man who is anxious to see his work accomplished.

"Come with me for a few weeks. We'll prove that your article was not false. That we both know what we're talking about."

The idea sounded fine. Yet, I had to get work. Ann asked me to waste no time, and I owed that much to her.

"I planned to take my fiancee to Saratoga for two weeks," I said. "She has an uncle there and we both wanted to get away. After that, I have to find a new position."

Crocket put one hand on my shoulder.

"I hate to lose you," he said. "You're the only person thus far who has grasped what I am trying to prove. Couldn't both of you come up to my place? Perhaps, in two weeks, we can go a long way toward presenting definite proof that I'm right. There's good fishing, swimming and boating at Lake Speer. I'm sure it would be an ideal arrangement."

He smiled a little woefully.

"I'm sorry I can't hire you as an assistant. I haven't the financial means to pay you a salary, but I can feed you plenty of good food."

I told him I would call Ann. Secretly, I hated to part company with Crocket. He had become a symbol of truth to me. A man who dared face the world with what he believed, regardless of the greeting he received.

Ann realized the mental condition I was in. I think it was her wish that I settle this thing once and for all, in my own mind. She didn't pretend to agree with Crocket. In fact, she had made up her mind that she couldn't like the man who had influenced me so strongly. However, because Ann is naturally unselfish, she consented to changing her plans and going up to Lake Speer. Upon questioning Crocket, I found that Speer was a small, spring fed lake in Northern Minnesota. We could fly to twin cities and take a train from there.

"Outside of my own cottage, the only people on the lake are at a small camp about a mile away. In the summer a group of religious fanatics come up to relax and blow off steam. They never trouble me."

He was wrong. We were in for plenty of trouble, and not solely from the camp. Other people visited the lake that summer. People who never dreamed of going before the printing of the first installment of "Professor Crocket's Papers."

CHAPTER VII

A Visitor—with a Gun

ANN and I stood on the beach watching, as the big speed-boat cut white furrows across the blue surface of the lake. It turned a wide circle and came directly toward us. We had arrived at Lake Speer the night before. Professor Crocket's cottage turned out to be a brown-shingled affair, square, and with four large rooms on a single floor. There was a small lean-to kitchen against the back wall, making a fifth room, if one could call it that. With three bedrooms,

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and the laboratory, which we had not yet seen, the cottage was quite comfortable.

Ann suggested a morning swim, and we had been in for a short dip. Then the motor-boat roared to life somewhere across the lake and we watched it progress toward us for several minutes. It came in close, a slim, rakish craft, and rocked gently from side to side. The motor stopped and a man stood up, one hand still on the wheel. He saw us for the first time and steered the boat toward us. He was in close before he attempted to speak. When he did so, his voice was abrupt and powerful.

"You people know a Professor Crocket who's supposed to hang out up here?"

His voice was so commanding that, like a couple of children, both Ann and I tried to answer at once. Realizing how he had bluffed us, I stopped talking while Ann explained that Crocket's cottage was in sight among the trees and that we were his guests. Immediately, I was sorry that we had spoken. The boat was near us now. The stranger remained on his feet. He wore a well tailored, cleanly pressed suit, but there his ordinary appearance vanished. He had the ugliest face I've ever seen. There wasn't a blemish on it. No outstanding feature made him ugly.

It was the power in his eyes, the coarse, dark skin and the leering, kingly manner in which he spoke. He looked straight through Ann, as most any one would have done, considering the small, two-piece suit of ivory color that she was wearing. He stared at me, then, as a teacher would look upon the pupil in the back row.

"Thanks," he said. "Come out here and pull my boat in."

He didn't ask me. He said it quickly, and I knew if I had refused, it would have shocked him. The man had not been accustomed to receiving an argument. I don't know why I did it. I should have told him to go to hell. Instead, I waded into the water and caught the rope that was attached to the mahogany prow of the boat. I pulled it in gently until the nose touched the sand. He had stepped to the front end and as the prow caught the sand, he put one hand on my shoulder and jumped.

He didn't thank me. He didn't look back at us. He had covered half the distance to the cottage before I came back to my senses.

"Of all the . . ."

Ann chuckled.

"Count to ten, Johnny," she said. "That's the first time I've ever seen anyone lord it over you."

I was growing more angry by the second. I had no idea who the man was. The boat gave away nothing of his identity. It was upholstered throughout with rich, maroon leather. It smelled of money spent in huge amounts.

"If he thinks he can get away with that," I said. "I'll . . ."

She put a wet hand on my arm.

"Wait a minute," she said.

The man had entered the screened porch of the cottage and was waiting for Crocket to receive him. Then the door opened, a few words were exchanged and they both went inside.

"He evidently knows Mr. Crocket," Ann said. "You'd better not say anything. He may be a friend. I'd hate to have you hurt Mr. Crocket's opportunity for a new start, if anything like that is afoot."

She was right. Probably someone from the University. Perhaps Crocket would have another stab at the old job.

We went in for another swim, but I felt uneasy about the whole thing. I

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couldn't explain why.

I either made friends or bitter enemies of any person, upon our first meeting. On a number of occasions, I've judged human nature pretty accurately. This time I knew without asking the reason why, that the man who had gone to the cottage had been bluffing. How, or why, was still a puzzle. Half way to the diving raft, I turned and struck out swiftly for shore.

"Wait on the raft," I said. "I'm going in for some sun-glasses."

I heard Ann's tinkling laughter as she reached the raft.

"*Cream-puff*," she called.

I REACHED the shore and walked toward the cottage slowly, so that she wouldn't be curious. Once in the shadow of the porch, I turned abruptly, slipped in among the small pines that surrounded the building, and made my way silently along the side of it. It was sandy here and my feet were silent in the sun-warmed soil.

I knew that Crocket would take his guest into the lab. It wouldn't be logical for them to talk in the bedroom or kitchen.

Although I hadn't been in the lab yet, it was located at the northwest corner of the cottage. It had two large windows that pushed outward. These were open.

I heard voices inside. Staying close to the wall, I inched forward. A thick growth of evergreens hid me from Ann's sight. I heard Crocket's voice. It was calm, but I thought I recognized an undercurrent of fear. I stood very still, listening.

"I had nothing to do with preparing this fate for the world," he was saying. "I simply analyzed it and told others what I found."

"*You started the trouble*," the other voice said. "*Now you'll sign this paper*."

"I'm sorry," Crocket hesitated and I heard him sigh. "I'm unable to sign."

The sun was warm on my bare shoulders. I felt foolish standing there in swimming trunks. I had no weapon, nothing to protect myself.

"How about that punk out there swimming with his girl?" the stranger asked abruptly. "Is he the guy that wrote the article?"

Crocket didn't answer. There was a sound of heavy footsteps on the floor of the laboratory.

"You don't have to answer," the stranger said. His voice was as expressionless as ever. I could see that heavy set, evil face and the dark eyes that must be studying Crocket's every move. "I can get it out of the punk."

I was growing angry. I resented him and the way he spoke of me.

"I'll promise that after I've spoken to Sharp," Crocket said. "He'll refuse to deny a single word of this article. You'll find that he is intelligent and loyal enough to stand by me."

More sounds within the lab as though a chair was pushed roughly aside.

"You evidently ain't heard of me," the stranger said. "Certain business men don't think this article should be left in the public mind. It's causing a lot of trouble for these men. Contracts have been cancelled. Stocks have taken a nose dive. When the big shots get in trouble, they call on me to take care of that trouble. They put up the money for my protection and I do the rest."

Crocket laughed. He refused to be bluffed.

"You can't take care of *this* trouble," he said. "A gun and a silencer might save you for the time being. You might even escape the law. You *can't* escape certain laws that were set up to control this world. One of these days, and soon, you'll pay for the fact that

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you refuse to believe in me."

I moved a few inches closer to the open windows. *A gun—and silencer?* I was glad now that I had come up to the cottage. Very glad. I looked around for a weapon. My foot contacted a large stick of fire-wood half buried in the sand. I inched downward and picked it up.

"You don't believe in that guff yourself," the stranger said. "Someone paid you to stir up trouble. Before I leave, *I'm taking care of you, and your friends.*"

The way he spoke, the sound of him moving around told me that I must act fast. I stepped directly into line with the open window. I saw Crocket standing with his back to a long table. The stranger stood away from him, perhaps six feet with a pistol aimed at Crocket's heart. The gun was equipped with a long, wicked looking silencer.

My shadow fell across the floor. The man with the gun whirled.

"*Johnny*?"

Later, I thought Ann's sudden shout must have saved my life. She had been impatient and called from the raft. Her voice was loud enough to carry inside the cottage.

"Damn . . ."

THE man whirled and fired at me. However, Ann's call caught him off guard. He thought we were still down at the lake.

The bullet whizzed past my face. At the same time I swung the heavy stick with both hands directly at his face. He went down with a groan and Crocket took one swift leap, landing on top of him.

I was through the window and after the gun. It was on the floor near the two men. Crocket didn't have to fight. The stranger lay very still, his face bashed in, blood burbling from his mouth.

"*Johnny*?"

Ann's voice came again, from the path in front of the cottage.

"Nice work, Johnny," Crocket said. He went to a cabinet on the wall and found some gauze.

Swift footsteps sounded in the hall. Ann came in, fear written in her eyes.

"Good heavens," she stopped short, staring at the man on the floor. "What have you two been . . . ?"

She saw the gun in my hands, and the look on Crocket's face.

"I'm proud of you, Johnny," she said simply. "I guess I was a fool not to guess."

In five minutes we had the stranger's face well bandaged. We covered his eyes also, with a thick layer of clean gauze. I tied his wrists together with a length of rope, just in case. When he came around, I was sure that he'd think he was much more badly hurt than he really was. Warm water applied to his mouth proved that he was missing three teeth and had some deep surface cuts. With the bandage on, he was blind. He couldn't tear away the bandage as long as his hands were tied.

CHAPTER VIII

Delivered—One Corpse

BARNEY SLOCUM wasn't nearly as tough as he thought he was. We had him in bed with his ugly face swathed in bandages and his sting removed by taking away his gun. Barney became a quiet visitor. The worst problem we had was to find a place for him. All three rooms were full. I took him in with me and spent that night on a folding cot near the door.

Slocum finally told us his name. He had to talk, to let us know what a tough customer we had taken prisoner.

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He wondered just how badly he was hurt. Ann was busy with dinner. Crocket was down near the lake. He had hidden the speed boat in a heavily wooded cove a quarter of a mile down the shore and hadn't returned as yet.

Barney hadn't yet divulged his name.

He spoke suddenly from under the mass of bandages. His voice was muffled and he sounded less sure of himself.

"Anyone around here?"

I laughed outright. This was the tough guy an hour ago.

"You have company," I said. "Would you like me to read you a children's story, so you can go to sleep?"

He swore and struggled to release himself. His hands were tied to opposite sides of the bed with plenty of rope twisted around the springs.

"You wait until *they* hear about this," he said. "They'll come up here and smoke you out."

"And who are *they*?" I asked.

He swore again. I had suspected that he was a lone wolf. If, in truth, he was employed to murder Crocket, or make Crocket label his work as an outright lie, *they* wouldn't dare poke their noses in at a time like this. I've heard of big business employing killers. I've never heard of them coming to the funeral.

"Don't worry," I said. "The boat is hidden. You're pretty well taken care of yourself. No one will know you're here."

He was quite still after that.

"How badly is my face hurt?"

I told him we didn't know. There was too much blood. I said I thought his eyes were in bad shape.

He struggled to get up again, then sank back.

"Your name's Sharp, ain't it? I've seen you around the *Express* office."

He surprised me. I had never seen him before. I didn't answer.

"Mine's Barney Slocum."

That was different. I felt pretty good about bashing his face in. Although I'd never seen him, Slocum was well known for what he was. Barney had sent many a washed up political figure along the road to the cemetery. He killed, coolly and without much thought, for a price. Now I knew that no one would dare put pressure on us. Slocum was strictly a lone wolf. A dangerous one.

"Pleased to meet you, Barney," I said, "at the throwing end of a hardwood stick."

Most of the fight had been knocked out of him.

"You haven't decided to tell us why you came here? Who's paying the expenses for this ill-fated man hunt?"

He didn't answer.

I heard Ann in the kitchen rattling pots and pans. Crocket came up the path. I recognized the light footsteps on the porch. I went out to meet him.

"I THINK we can make Slocum talk," Crocket said calmly. "That is, if you think it's worth while?"

We were just finishing up some of the finest corn bread that I've ever tasted. I decided that if Ann could make corn bread like this, I'd marry her inside of the next month. Besides, this was the first time I'd ever seen her with her cheeks red from the stove, a little red and white apron wrapped around her attractive middle, eyes snapping with adventure. The odor of pines came through the kitchen window. All in all, with Barney Slocum tied securely to the bed in the other room, it was a swell world.

An idea was buzzing around inside my skull.

"I think it would be a good idea to make Barney talk, and fast," I said. "But he isn't the talking kind. What's

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the plan?"

Crocket smiled. He helped himself to another slab of Ann's corn bread and broke it up in his milk.

"Part of my future depends on a machine I have perfected," he said. "I wasn't going to mention it until you two had had a day of rest. Now I think we'd better use the *Memory Finder* at once."

I remembered a long, coffin shaped cabinet in the lab. Busy with Slocum, I hadn't given it a second thought.

"The cabinet is a *Memory Finder*," Crocket said. "I spent many years developing it. I planned to use it on you first. Perhaps Slocum will make a good guinea pig."

I saw Ann's nose wrinkle. After feeding Crocket, she had fallen in love with the gray-haired, keen-minded professor. She refused, however, to have any part in his work.

"Do we *have* to talk about that?" she asked.

Crocket wasn't angry with her.

"I'll confess that your cooking is by far the most interesting subject tonight," he said, and his eyes were twinkling. "However, if you'll be kind to Johnny and me I think we can impress you shortly."

Ann reached over and mussed my hair.

"Johnny impressed me a long time ago," she said. "But I didn't do so well with him. He refuses to marry me."

I protested, and Crocket interrupted gravely.

"If I thought I was spoiling any happiness for you two," he said, "I'd send you back to the city tonight. I feel, somehow, that everything will work out for the best. Now—shall we assist Mr. Slocum to the laboratory?"

Barney Slocum lay full length inside the coffin shaped *Memory Finder*. He had to lie still. Murder and worse was in his mind, but his wrists and ankles were firmly gripped by metal bands that in turn, were anchored to the sides of the box. Crocket wheeled a table to the side of the cabinet.

It was dark outside and wind blew in from the lake, sighing high in the pines. The lights were on and the lab was bright, almost cheery. There was nothing mysterious about Crocket's actions. He seemed to know what he was doing.

The table held the oddest looking machine I've ever seen. It had a huge, elongated glass tube filled with red, sparkling liquid. The tube was mounted on two uprights that allowed it to pivot end over end. Underneath was an electric motor, with wheels and gears attached to whirl the tube.

Crocket unrolled three coils of wire and attached them, with the aid of clamps, to both wrist bands and the band on Crocket's left leg.

He turned on the power and a gauge, mounted on the edge of the cabinet, lighted. The needle quivered up and down the line of numbers. They read 1947-1946-1945-1944-1943-1942—and so on, back to 1900.

He adjusted a nob so the needle pointed to 1947.

"I think this is as far as we'll have to go, tonight," he said.

Ann and I were both curious. The experiment had all the earmarks of a Mad Professor movie thriller, yet I had faith in Crocket.

WHEN the motor came on, the tube started to revolve, throwing the red liquid from one end of the tube to the other, as it turned end over end. The swish-swish of the liquid grew steadier, faster, as the motor gained speed. The liquid was a scarlet blur now. Then, to my amazement, a rainbow of color splashed into the air and

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hovered in a halo over the machine.

"Thought-rays," Crocket explained in a cool voice, "colored artificially by the machine, so that I can detect them."

He spoke to Slocum partly to calm him, partly for our benefit.

"The *Memory Finder* will not harm you," he said. "The machine makes you feel drowsy. The electric-ray going through your body collects thoughts from your brain and forces you to speak them aloud. When the machine stops, you will not remember what you have said. Your subconscious mind tells us what we want to know. Your conscious mind will not know that you have spoken."

"I'm not afraid," Slocum said. His voice sounded hollow and unreal.

The tube flashed around so fast that the liquid was no longer red. Colors came and vanished—green—purple—gray—yellow. . . .

"The machine is set at 1947," Crocket said softly. "What is the important thing in 1947?"

An unmistakable chuckle came from Slocum's lips.

"*You are,*" he said. "*You're turned things upside down. You've turned their plans upside down.*"

Crocket's voice remained calm but his face was red. His hands were shaking as he turned to me.

"This will be very simple," he said. "Then he turned and snapped a question at Slocum.

"*Name the men who sent you.*"

Silence. We all waited. Slocum was fighting his subconscious mind.

"*Name them. . . .*"

Crocket's voice was hard.

Slocum relaxed. His voice was tired, far away.

"*Johnson,*" he said. "*Oland Johnson.*"

I clenched my fists and swallowed.

"*And?*"

"Johnson got plenty of pressure from the big shots," Slocum said. "He had to publish a personal apology for running the article. He has to get a signed statement from you that your papers are false."

He went on, naming names of men in industry, banking, big business.

I didn't hear much of it.

So the owner of the *Express,* Oland Johnson was responsible for this? First he fired me. Now he had tried to have Crocket murdered.

I squeezed Ann's arm and left the room. I heard Crocket switch off the machine and I knew that Ann was following me.

"Johnny—don't do anything foolish, please."

I turned and caught her in my arms. I kissed her.

"I'm on Crocket's side, all the way," I said. "Johnson tried to pull a fast one. If he had succeeded, his hands would be clean, but all three of us would be dead.

"That's all I need. The world should have a chance to read the other half of 'Professor Crocket's Papers'! People need *all* the information to draw a fair conclusion. Big business and lousy politicians aren't going to stop it from being published."

"But who—how? No one would dare touch it now."

I grinned. I was plenty happy. Happy enough to kill Johnson bare handed if he got in my way. The telephone was one of those old style, crank models. It hung on the wall near the front door.

"Just watch me," I said and went to the phone.

I cranked the phone until the local operator answered.

"I'm calling long distance, New York," I said. "A person-to-person call to Oland Johnson, owner of the

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Daily Express."

I stood there waiting for them to find the big shot. I was so damned burned up and excited that my hands were shaking. I could hardly hold the receiver. Ann waited, her face very pale, her eyes on my face. Somehow, I got the idea that she was darn proud of me right now. She held up her hand so I could see it in the half light of the hall. Her fingers were crossed.

"YES? Oland Johnson speaking." The voice was faint over the phone. I could detect impatience in his words. I had never met Johnson. He wasn't the type to mingle with the ink slaves who ran his paper.

"This is John Sharp calling, Johnson," I said, and I wasn't careful about the anger in my voice. "I'll come straight to the point."

I heard him sputter with sudden anger. "John Sharp? You aren't the kid who was responsible for that Crocket article?"

"You're damned right I am," I said. "And I'm calling about running the second installment."

I figured that would get him and it did. When he had finished with a long choice list of oaths he said:

"I told Keen to fire you."

"He did," I said, "but that doesn't prevent me from using a public phone. Now, about that second installment of 'Professor Crocket's Papers'."

"You go to hell," he said, and I knew from his voice that he would hang up in another minute.

"Likewise," I said, "but first, listen to what I have to say. We've caught your pet, Barney Slocum. He's told everything about the deal you made him. We've put him where he can't talk with anyone. *If you see things our way.*"

I heard him gasp for his breath, as he tried to control his voice.

"I never heard of Barney Slocum," he said. "You've got some sort of scheme up your sleeve."

If he could bluff, okay. I just wanted him to know that he wasn't bluffing me.

"That's all right too," I said. "But if the second installment of my article isn't released tomorrow, and without editorial comment, Slocum will be in the hands of the local police. *He'll* tell a story that I can peddle to *all* the papers. It will put the *Express* in a deeper hole than you've ever thought of digging."

"*Wait a minute,*" he begged. "We may have been hasty about firing you. Perhaps you could be placed on the pay roll and take a vacation until this thing blows over."

"I got ideals," I said sarcastically. "See you in the funny papers."

I hung up.

Ann grabbed me as I turned away from the phone.

"Did he promise to print it?"

I took her arm and led her back toward the lab.

"We'll know tomorrow. Meanwhile, let's see some more of that machine and what it's doing to Slocum."

The tube had stopped whirling and the power was off when we went in. Slocum was sitting up.

"Had a nice rest," he said. He was a little more friendly than he had been at first. Slocum had always dealt with men who settled their arguments with lead. He never ceased to wonder why we were so decent to him after he tried to murder us. "Guess you guys sorta flopped, if you expected *me* to do any talking."

Crocket turned and winked at me.

"You see what I mean?"

He had told us that Slocum would have no memories. It was true. Slo-

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cum thought he had been asleep and unable to communicate with anyone.

"It's a wonderful discovery," I said. "I imagine this was only a small example of what can be done."

Crocket nodded. Then he spoke to Slocum.

"If you'll give me your gentleman's agreement that you won't try to escape, I'll untie you and let you sit in the sun a while this afternoon. You need it."

BEHIND the mask, Barney Slocum was silent. I could fairly hear the man's mind in action. Here were people who not only treated him decently, but offered him temporary freedom, backed by his word of honor.

"You're a funny bunch," he said. His voice was oddly strained. I knew that it put him on the spot. "Yea! I ain't ever been a Boy Scout, but if I can get a place in the sun for a while, I'll be good."

Ann rewrapped his bandages so that he could see. She helped him to a chair on the front porch. It was warm and sunny there. When I looked out a half hour later, Barney Slocum, the lone wolf and the killer was sound asleep. Killers, if Slocum was an example, snored loudly.

I returned to Crocket in the laboratory.

"We've drawn his fangs," I said. "He's resting like the 'bad little kid'."

I heard the car on the state highway almost from the time it left the end of the lake. It surprised me, because little traffic comes this way. Crocket's cottage is the only sign of habitation along the south side of Lake Speer, and our only visitor thus far had been Barney Slocum.

It must have been close to midnight. I lay on my back, eyes wide open, staring up at the ceiling. In my bed, Barney Slocum slept soundly. We had tied him up again, as soon as night came. He was too valuable a piece of property to risk losing during the darkness.

The night was stormy. The wind howled across the lake and sent rain whipping against the windows. The door to Crocket's lab swung back and forth, squeaking a protest at the draft through the hall. Above the sound of the storm, I could still hear the car. Its motor roared loudly and I could trace its progress as it came closer.

At last I knew it must be close to the small rutted road that led to the cottage. Perhaps I wasn't too surprised when I heard the gears clash and knew it was bouncing down the eighth of a mile of rutted road to the cottage.

The sound of the car worried me. Who would be coming here as late at night as this? I arose quietly and dressed in my slippers and robe. Barney was still asleep, his arms outstretched, the knots tight on his wrists. I went into the hall. The car was close now and I watched it as it whirled into the yard, circled and stopped with a jerk near the door. I stepped to the porch. I could hear the others moving about inside. The car had hardly halted before the front door flew open and a rain coated figure jumped out and dashed to the protection of the porch.

He almost knocked me over, uttered a surprised oath and got control of himself.

"I—I gotta see Mr. Crocket," he said.

I managed to get a lantern lighted, and as he spoke, I tossed the match into the rain. I held up the light where I could see the visitor. His face was thin and covered with a day's growth of beard. I knew he was a Lake Speer product. I had seen him working near the gas station down at the crossroad.

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"I think he'll be out in a minute," I said.

I heard Crocket moving in his room.

"I'm Pinky Robin," the stranger said. "I *did* have a man who wanted to come up here. After what happened, I didn't know what else to do. I brought him anyhow."

It was a puzzling statement, and I didn't pretend to understand him. I *did* understand that Mr. Pinky Robin was one of the most frightened individuals I'd ever met.

"Crocket will be out right away," I said. "I don't see anyone in the car."

Robin started to shiver. He looked wildly toward the cottage, then out into the rain at the glistening car.

"You can't see him from here," he said. His teeth were chattering. *"He—it's on the floor."*

"On the floor?"

He shook his head automatically. Rain streaked down his face.

"He's dead."

I pushed the screen door open and ran, head down, toward the car. The rain hit me like liquid ice through the thin robe. I threw open the back door to the sedan.

The figure of a man, clad in top-coat and bowler hat, slipped silently past me and hit, face down in the mud.

CHAPTER IX

Barney Slocum Escapes

I HEARD Ann's short, startled scream and sensed Crocket's presence beside me. I leaned down and turned the corpse over so that a white face lay exposed to the rain. Slowly the mud dissolved and streaked away so the features were visible. I didn't recognize him.

"It's Johnson," Crockett said. *"Oland Johnson.* He was present at the board meeting the day I was ousted from the Pinecrest staff. I'd recognize him anywhere."

Together we carried the corpse to the porch. It wasn't my first contact with death, but I had never had a corpse delivered to my door before. Ann went into the kitchen and started some coffee. She lighted the fire that was ready for morning. When I went in, Pinky Robin was sitting beside the stove drinking coffee. Crocket went to the phone. I wolfed down a cup of coffee and went to my room. I was shivering violently. The robe stuck to me and I was plastered with mud. The noise had awakened Barney Slocum. He turned his head as I came in.

"What's up?" He was friendly enough, and as curious as a schoolboy.

"Someone shot my old boss," I said.

He grinned.

"Johnson?"

I said: "Yes."

He lay very still as I discarded the robe, dried myself and started to dress. Then he laughed softly.

"Ain't I glad my hands have been tied all night," he said. "And that reminds me. I'm getting tired of laying in the same place. How about letting me up for a while?"

"Crocket's calling the State Police," I said. "They'll ask a lot of questions. I'll let you up if you promise to be good. You're a guest here. Do you understand that? You don't know anything about anything."

"Good enough, Johnny," he said. "You know, I'm beginning to like you."

Captain Dave Steele of the State Police climbed wearily from his coupe. Another trooper climbed out of the driver's seat and rounded the car. They both came in out of the rain. Steele was tall and looked much taller in the neat boots and gray whipcord trou-

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sers. He tore his trench coat off and dried his face on a towel that Ann brought from the kitchen.

"It's a hell of a night for a man to get shot." He stared moodily at the blanketed figure of Oland Johnson. We had placed the body on the porch swing.

His companion was red cheeked and a trifle chubby. He looked as though he spent most of his time behind the wheel. His uniform was shiny and worn from slipping in and out of cars.

Crocket introduced Ann and I. The Captain's driver was Jim Walters of the Highway Patrol. He said little and smiled bashfully at Ann.

"Now then," Steele said briskly. "Who is this corpse and how did it happen?"

Pinky Robin came from the kitchen carrying a half-emptied cup of coffee.

"A car went by us on the road, Captain," Pinky said. "Someone shot from an open window."

Steele looked mildly surprised at Pinky Robin's presence.

"Hello, Pink," he said. "I'm glad you're in on this."

He turned to Crocket.

"Pink's a good boy," he said. "I'm glad you warmed him up with that coffee. I could stand some myself."

Ann went into the kitchen for some cups. Steele crossed the porch and lifted the blanket that shrouded Johnson. He took a long look then dropped it again. He whistled.

"There's something about a corpse," he said soberly, "that's so damned final." He didn't get tough like cops at home would have. He let us talk and he listened.

"This fellow came into town from the private landing field down at the corners," Pinky said. "Told me he had chartered a plane from New York and wanted me to drive him up here."

"It was raining blue-blazes before we'd come a mile. About three miles back a big car whirled by us, damned near went into the ditch, and someone shot at us from the rear seat. This—this man," he pointed at the blanket, "let out one groan and I heard him hit the floor."

Pinky Robin gulped and drank the remainder of his coffee hurriedly.

"The other car dropped behind and I—I just kept on driving."

"I think the shot might have awakened me," I told Steele. "Of course the sound must have been far away, but suddenly I was wide awake and staring up at the ceiling. Something about the car coming this way troubled me. I was on the porch when Robin drove in."

BARNEY Slocum came from the kitchen. I half wished that he had stayed out of sight. Steele shook hands with him and he and Dave Walters exchanged friendly grins.

"I'm going to call the coroner," Steele said. "Dave, you'd better go back to town. I'll call headquarters and have all the roads blocked. You tell the boys what happened here."

Walters got into the car and vanished up the rain swept road. Steele spent ten minutes on the phone. Then he came to the kitchen. We were all staying close to the stove.

"I believe Pinky's story," he said, "so I guess that lets you people out for the time being. Any of you have a car up here?"

I shook my head.

"We came in a bus from the station," I said. "Mr. Slocum hiked up from the train."

Steele nodded.

"You have any idea why the man who was shot was trying to get up here, Professor?"

Crocket's face betrayed new emotion.

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"His name is Johnson," he said. "Oland Johnson, owner of the New York *Daily Express*. He made sure that I lost my teaching position because of an article Mr. Sharp wrote for his paper. I have a copy that you are at liberty to read."

Steele smiled.

"You weren't mad at him, were you?"

Crocket shrugged.

"I didn't admire Johnson for what he did," he said. "But I wouldn't kill a man."

"No," Steele said thoughtfully, "I don't think you would."

He stood up.

"If you're ready to go back to town, Pink," he said, "you can drive me. I want to take a look at the car. We can do that when we get it in the garage."

The coroner arrived before Steele left. A half hour later Lake Speer was quiet once more. The rain stopped. We sat in the kitchen for some time, trying to figure out who killed Oland Johnson, and wondering what Steele had in store for us. Barney Slocum was strangely silent.

At last he arose.

"Tie me up again, will you pal?" he asked me. "I need a little more beauty sleep."

I said:

"Go to bed and don't bother me. I can't stand people who are always asking to be tied up."

He hesitated, then slapped me on the back.

"You won't regret that," he said and went to the room.

I was ready to turn in. Poor Ann didn't look as though she'd sleep again, however.

"Sort of a tough night, kid. Not exactly like quiet little old New York."

She shook her head.

"I'm all right," she said. "It's just the coffee. It keeps me awake."

"*Not to mention corpses,*" I said, under my breath.

"I guess I'll find a chair," I said, "lean back under a lamp and read until morning. It might as well be in your room."

She looked grateful.

"Maybe the coffee *won't* keep me awake, if you're around to look at," she said.

I waited in the hall for her to announce that she was warmly tucked in. The phone rang. I lifted the receiver. It was Larry Keen calling from New York.

"Hello, you old son-of-a-gun," he shouted. "Say, Johnny, what the hell did you do to Oland Johnson."

He startled me.

"*Me?*"

"Yea," he said, and I could sense complete happiness and satisfaction in his voice. "Old Simon Legree Johnson called up this afternoon and told us to run installment two of 'Professor Crocket's Papers' on the front page of all tomorrow's editions. I was out of town and just got back. We're going to knock the hell out of a lot of people's thinking. What changed Johnson's mind?"

"I wish I knew," I said absently. "It'll be pretty hard to find out now. Johnson's dead."

"*What . . . ?*"

"He was shot tonight, sometime just before midnight."

I heard him gasp.

"Shot? But . . . ?"

"In the head," I said. "By persons unknown, while on his way to see us here at Lake Speer."

"Hold the fort," he yelled. "I'll get *that* story written and see you first thing in the morning. I can still get a plane."

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"Be careful," I said dryly. *"Daily Express* men aren't very popular up here."

I hung up. I was glad Larry was coming to help straighten things up. I wasn't very sorry Oland Johnson was a corpse.

Crocket was busy in the lab. When I found a book with a decent title I went to Ann's room. I heard the tube of the *Memory Finder* as it spun in its colorful orbit in the lighted lab. Professor Crocket was working on something. Working against time.

Barney was sound asleep, snoring loudly.

I made myself comfortable in a blanket covered wicker chair, drew the light close to my head and looked at Ann. She was already asleep, breathing softly. Her face was calm and lovely on the pillow.

"Remember, Johnny," I said to myself, "you're a perfect gentleman."

I opened the book.

MY EYELIDS came apart reluctantly as though they had been stuck with paste. I was still in the chair, or at least partly in it. The book was on the floor and the light was weak and almost invisible in the clear sunlight that streamed through the windows.

I stretched and found out that my neck, though stiff, was still connected with my shoulders.

Ann was asleep. I don't think she had moved since midnight. I stood up, stretched and went silently to the bed. I leaned over, and feeling like a thief, kissed her gently on the forehead. She didn't move. I kissed her again, this time full on the lips. She smiled and moved in her sleep.

I went outside. In the hall, the phone caught my eye and the night's events came flooding back. At once I was conscious of a splitting headache. Perhaps I could dress and have a walk by the lake before the others awakened.

I pushed the door to my room open and stood there, staring at the bed.

I had been an idiot. Barney Slocum was gone.

I was frightened over what his absence meant to us all. Barney was the only man who might tell us the names of the men who were back of the fight against the *Express*. Barney, whom I had grown to trust, had pulled that "my pal" stuff on me until I thought he meant it.

Perhaps there was still a chance.

In two minutes flat I had my shoes on. I found a pair of corduroy trousers and a striped wool shirt. I hit the hall with the shirt half on and once outside ran swiftly down the trail to the lake.

In the sand I found Barney's footprints. I followed them north.

Barney must have listened to the sound of the boat, the day Crocket hid it. He wasn't half so dead to the world as we had thought. I followed the trail for a long time, knowing what I would find, or rather what I wouldn't find.

In the cove, I saw the mark on the beach where the boat had been tied. Barney's footprints were there.

Sick at heart, I retraced my footsteps toward the cottage.

Ann was awake and in the kitchen.

I went in and sat down at the table. I didn't know how to break the news.

"Morning, Johnny," she said. "Thanks for watch-dog act last night. I slept like a log."

"Barney's gone," I said.

"What . . . ?"

She whirled, frying pan in her hand, and stared at me.

"Johnny—you don't mean . . . ?"

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I nodded.

"He escaped in the night. Stole the boat."

I thought she was going to cry.

"Everything happens to us," she said. "I guess we've lost our last chance to find out who murdered Mr. Johnson."

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. I managed to put away an egg and a slice of toast.

"Hasn't Crocket awakened yet?" I asked.

She shook her head. I noticed that she didn't look at me again. She kept busy, her eyes on the stove.

"Maybe I'd better awaken him."

I stood up and went to Crocket's room. I knocked several times without an answer. At last, I opened the door and went in. He wasn't in bed. The bed hadn't been slept in.

Had Crocket pulled out also? Had he gone away like Barney, to let us face the music alone?

That wasn't like the Professor. I had grown to look at him as a father.

Then I remembered the light in the laboratory. The whirring of the *Memory Finder*. Had anything happened . . . ?

I ran to the laboratory door and tried it. It was locked.

"Professor?"

ONLY silence. I thought I could hear the faint hum of the electric motor. I wasn't sure. I didn't call Ann. I ran out the front door and around to the windows that looked in upon the room. Crocket was lying in the box of the *Memory Finder*. One hand was flung over the edge of the box. It was stiff and very white. A strange blue light hung like a mist over the slowly rotating tube.

I picked up the same stick of wood that I had thrown at Barney. I hit the window with all my strength and felt it go to pieces under the impact. I reached in, released the catch and opened the glassless sash. In a second I was over the sill and into the room.

"Johnny—Johnny!!"

Ann was pounding on the door. Her voice rang with fear. I ran to the door and released the catch. It flew open and she ran it. I went to the machine and snapped off the motor.

I felt Crocket's pulse. It was very faint, but he was still alive.

I knew very little of the machine and how it worked. I stood there, staring dumbly at what seemed to be a white, stiffened corpse.

Then a strange thing happened. The blue light faded, and Crocket's finger started to move, groping for the switch. He was still trying to turn off the motor, as he had evidently had been trying to do when he was overcome.

Thank God it wasn't too late. I took his hand in mine and started to rub his arm. Blood poured back into it. He moved. His eyes opened, stared at me and fluttered closed again.

A weak smile parted his lips.

"Thanks," he said, and lay still. He looked normal now, his face flushed and alive again.

I didn't tell Professor Crocket about Barney. I couldn't do it, at least not until he was fully recovered.

He sat up in bed and told us the story of the *Memory Finder*.

"You'll have to know," he said. "You should have known long ago. I realize now, that if something happened to me, you'd be unable to go on alone.

"I told you the *Memory Finder* would make a man tell memories under its power. If you were under the machine's control, you would tell everything that has happened to you in any year I chose to set the machine. It

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isn't designed for the job we did on Barney Slocum. It works well, as we found out, but that isn't its real use."

He was still very ill, and spoke in a low voice. I held Ann's hand and leaned very close to his lips.

"I'll be better soon. Then I'll show you how to do what I failed to do tonight. I told you once that our history is a bogus one. That we remember things that actually never happened. If I am able to set the machine back far enough, somewhere along the line, the person under its power will refuse to remember anything. The false memories that were placed in our minds will refuse to function and the subconscious mind will take over."

He hesitated, and Ann pressed a cup of coffee to his lips. He sipped it.

"The subconscious mind will do one of two things. Either it will refuse to disclose information that doesn't truly exist, or it will skip the gap and tell us what happened before we came here:—what happened on that other planet."

Ann was smiling. It wasn't completely sincere. She had grown to love Crocket as I had, but she refused, even now, to believe that we had any past but the obvious one.

"You will see, child," Crocket noticed her look of disbelief, and did not condemn her for it. "Perhaps *you* will prove to us that our theories are sound."

Ann squeezed his hand.

"If you promise to stay in bed and rest today," she said, "I'll be a good little guinea pig."

CHAPTER X

Murder Clues and Hot News

LARRY arrived at noon. He's the only man I know who can kiss Ann on the lips without making my fists tighten. He did it, too, and enjoyed the contact as any normal man might. Ann blushed like a school girl and pretended to be angry. After Larry had paid Pinky Robin for the drive up to the lake, Pinky departed and Larry cornered me for the full story of Johnson's death. He had called Captain Steele and gathered enough material for the story. Steele refused to comment on his attitude toward the case.

"He's a good guy, though," Larry insisted. "You don't have to worry about him."

"I wasn't," I said. "Did the second half of my article go to press today?"

He grinned.

"You know," he said thoughtfully, "you've got something there. Transworld Press asked permission to send that story to their papers. That means three-quarters of the world will read it before tomorrow night."

I wasn't unhappy about that.

"Perhaps we'll hit a few intelligent readers, with that kind of circulation," I said hopefully.

Larry grimaced.

"You've sold me," he admitted. "I half expect to be pulled out of this world at any minute and tossed to another planet. Don't get the idea that we aren't reaching intelligent people with the *Express*. Before I left a hundred phone calls had come in. People want to know where they can reach you and Crocket. *Life* is sending up a photographer for an essay on Crocket, and the way he lives."

I wanted to tell the Professor but he was still confined to his room.

"And that's not all," Larry said. "A certain wolf of Wall Street named Jeffery Pinchott called me. He wanted to talk to Johnson. The Johnson murder story hadn't hit the street yet.

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Pinchott called long distance because he was out of town. Told me to lay off your story or he'd see the *Express* burning in hell, press by press."

Pinchott? I wondered if he was one of the men behind Barney Slocum's jaunt to Lake Speer. I thought I should tell Larry Keen the whole story. I did, in the next half hour, while Ann prepared lunch and went to see how Professor Crocket felt.

We spent the afternoon bathing and talking over plans for the future, what few we had. It was close to dark before Crocket felt like getting up. The sun was setting when the roar of a car sounded on the highway.

"Probably Steele is coming up," I said. "I'm pretty sure he'll have something of interest to tell us by this time."

Keen changed from his bathing suit into street clothes, made a call to New York and reported that the city was buzzing over Professor Crocket and his strange story.

Then a car roared down the drive and damned near turned over as it turned on the soft grass and halted before the porch. It wasn't Steele.

A gaunt, pale faced man jumped out. He carried a black brief case and wore a velvet collared coat and black felt hat. He threw open the porch door and stormed in. I was the first person to stop him. I think he was determined to search every room, if necessary, to dig us out.

I looked over his shoulder and noticed a chauffeur sitting stiffly in the car. It was an expensive model.

"Where in the hell is Crocket, or the John Sharp who licks his boots?"

The question was spoken harshly, as though he kept a piece of sandpaper in his mouth to sharpen his tongue.

It didn't exactly promote friendship on my part.

"My name is Sharp," I said. "But I'm not in the habit of cleaning boots in the manner you suggested."

HE DIDN'T offer his hand. He slammed his brief case down on the porch swing, removed his gloves and hat, and sat down beside the case.

"My name is Pinchott," he said in an important voice. "Jeffery Pinchott of New York. I want to see this crackpot Crocket."

Professor Crocket appeared at the door.

"Then you may come into my laboratory," he said in a cool voice. "That is if you make up your mind to use a slightly more friendly method of handling your hosts."

Pinchott turned an ugly red, stood up without a word, gathered his gloves, hat and brief case and followed Crocket into the hall.

I heard the door to the laboratory close. I wandered out to the car and smiled at the chauffeur.

"Nice boss you got," I said.

"Nice enough to me," he snapped.

He wasn't the friendly type. I didn't intend to get pushed around twice in the same day. I went over and put one foot on the running board. I was on the right hand side of the car.

"What's the matter with you two?" I asked. "Been eating snails for dinner?"

He didn't answer. He was the perfect chauffeur that you see in the movies. I took my foot off the running board and started to turn. The back window was rolled down an inch or two.

On the glass were dozens of tiny, microscopic specks of dust. Otherwise the glass was clean and well polished.

I tried not to jump to conclusions. Yet, the idea seemed quite possible. I looked at the chauffeur again, but he ignored me, staring straight ahead.

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I looked down at the tires. They were clean, and wet from the damp grass. Casually, I sauntered back around the car, toward the cottage. As I did so I glanced down at the left tires. They were covered with mud. The wheels were muddy half way to the hubs.

I remembered Pinky Robin's description of the murder car.

It had swerved off the road on the left hand side and the shot had been fired through the rear window.

Were the spots on the back window powder marks from the death gun?

I knew there was a job I had to do. In a few hours both the powder marks and the tires would be washed clean. Captain Steele had to see them for himself before it was too late. I tried to walk slowly as I went to the cottage. I reached the phone and called police headquarters. It seemed like an hour before I contacted Steele.

I kept my voice low but there was no need for it. The conversation in the lab was pitched well above my voice.

I HAD just hung up the receiver when Big Business in the form of irate Jeffery Pinchott shot from the laboratory door, fairly ran along the hall and stopped to face me. His lips were blue with anger. He shook from head to foot.

"You addle-brained idiot," he shouted. "I can't reason with that crack-pot."

"The name is Crocket," I corrected him.

"Don't be smart with me, young fellow," he snapped. "Will *you* see that those articles are properly covered by a statement that they are not the truth, and that you made an error in writing them?"

I would like to have taken a crack at him then and there. He was so damned cock-sure of himself. I knew that Steele should be on his way and I had to stall Pinchott as long as possible. I adopted a slightly more friendly attitude. I knew, also, that Larry Keen was listening to every word from his place in the kitchen. Pinchott was apt to break loose with stuff Larry could use.

"Just what have you against Professor Crocket and myself?" I asked.

Pinchott, who reminded me of a buzzard about to land on his prey, calmed himself enough to speak English.

"For your information, I control a good share of big business in New York," he said. "I also represent men who own a large share of the *Express*. These articles are throwing the whole market to the wolves. What you've printed has knocked buying and selling in the head. Soon the whole country, perhaps even our foreign trade, will stop and wait for what's going to happen next. We can't allow such a condition to exist. It isn't healthy."

I grinned.

"You mean it stops the flow of the coin of the realm into your money boxes." I heard Steele's car on the state highway. "No, Mr. Pinchott," I said, "I'm sorry, but the story remains as it is. We'll release more material later. For the time being, you can tell your chauffeur to take the shortest route and drive you straight to hell."

He raised his brief case in his hand. For a minute I thought he was going to hit me with it. Then he thought better of the idea, turned and stormed out.

Over his shoulder, he shouted:

"I'll wreck the *Express* for this. I'll buy it, lock, stock and barrel."

Steele's car had already turned and was coming down the private road when Pinchott drove out. They would

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meet somewhere on the one way stretch.

Larry came out of the kitchen. He looked worried.

"Pinchott wasn't talking through his hat," he said. "He knows who has the stock. He might be able to bully Oland Johnson's representatives into selling enough for a controlling share."

Captain Steele drove in five minutes later. He climbed out of his car. He saw me on the porch and smiled, rubbing a weary hand over his forehead.

"Mr. Pinchott is quite a character," he said. "I'm threatened with everything but the electric chair. He's going to have my job for holding him up for a witless conversation."

I had already told the others what I found out about Pinchott's car. Ann was for arresting Pinchott at once, and hanging him by the ears. Larry congratulated me for calling Steele.

"Did you find that my story checked?" I asked, as he came into the screened porch.

He nodded.

"Only the power of God and the State Police kept him from driving right through me," he said dryly. "I asked him a few silly questions about why he was there and got nasty answers. While I talked, I checked the glass and the tires. You *might* be right. Pinchott says he flew to Twin Cities and borrowed a friend's car for the trip up here. He said he was in New York last night."

Larry Keen interrupted.

"Pardon me, Captain Steele." He stepped forward and introduced himself. "Pinchott called me last night. *He called by long distance.* I can have that checked."

"We'll do it, at once," Steele turned to me again.

"Any idea how he might have managed the killing?"

I had been thinking of nothing else for the past hour.

"HE KNEW Johnson was coming here and he knew, also, that Johnson had consented to print the second article. He probably tried to reason with the owner of the *Express,* failed to do so and followed him last night. It was rainy, but Johnson evidently hadn't rolled up the window in Pinky's car.

"Johnson was sitting on the left side of the rear seat. Pinky drove fast and took most of the road. Pinchott told his man to cut out on the left shoulder of the highway and the tires sank in the mud. They pulled up beside the car Robin was driving. Pinchott rolled his window down and took a rather lucky shot. The glass was damp and the powder stains stuck to it."

Steele nodded thoughtfully.

"Pinchott is the type who would kill," he said. "He'd depend on his money and position to save him."

"We might get the chauffeur to talk," Keen suggested.

"I'm afraid not," I said. "He's a good mate for Pinchott. If my theory is correct, that chauffeur already has enough money to support him for the remainder of his life. Pinchott parked somewhere last night. He went to town and checked with the New York office this morning. When he found out the *Express* was already on the street, he called Keen and asked for Johnson. A nice way to establish an alibi. He overlooked the fact that we might check the call."

After that we talked everything over carefully. I felt that Steele trusted us, at least to the extent of making his investigation a quiet one. He knew nothing about Barney Slocum, and I was glad of that. It might go bad for the sentimental gunman.

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Steele left after he had sampled a stack of Ann's pancakes. I told Crocket of Slocum's disappearance and he and the others agreed that we could do nothing about it. Thus, for the time being, the Johnson murder case was in Steele's hands. We hoped he could pin it on Pinchott, and do so before Pinchott was able to work the *Daily Express* deal in his favor.

"Thought you'd like to see what's happening in your home town," Larry said. He dropped several copies of the *Express* on my lap. "While I was at the crossroads, I called New York. They checked the Pinchott call. It came from Bradbury, a little town about thirty miles south of here. I let Steele talk with long distance. He's in touch with the police in New York and at Twin Cities. They expect to let Pinchott return to New York without disturbing him. They'll take the car and the chauffeur just as soon as he leaves his friend at Twin Cities."

All of this was good news.

"What's your personal opinion, Larry?" I asked. "Can they make Pinchott talk with the evidence they have?"

He shrugged.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "Pinchott can buy lawyers and judges by the dozen. He doesn't like what the *Express* did. It's a personal grudge now against you and Crocket."

He went inside and I heard him challenge Ann to a swim. I felt bewildered. The theory of the bogus world hadn't affected Ann or Larry as it had me. I was anxious to have it over with as soon as possible.

I watched them go toward the lake, then settled down with the papers. Larry had written the introduction to the second installment of "Professor Crocket's Papers."

New York—May 6. Our last Sunday edition of the Daily Express including the startling story by Reporter John Sharp telling the world about Professor James Crocket and his theory that the world is a synthetic product, placed here to test man's reaction to environment. The article received such widespread attention that we are devoting the front page to the second and last installment. Although the Express refuses to comment on its own attitude toward Crocket, we are willing and anxious to present to you the full story, so that you, the reader, can draw your own conclusions."

I STARTED to read the story, wondering if I had been entirely sane the night I worked over it so carefully. A car roared on the highway. I listened and it turned down the private road. Then another came within hearing distance. In ten minutes, just as the first vehicle came skidding to a halt outside the door, I could count seven different cars on their way toward the cottage.

As Crocket was busy in the lab, and the others were swimming, I met the tall, curly headed youth that jumped from the coupe and ran in my direction.

"You're Sharp of the *Express*," he said breathlessly. "My name is Williams of the *Chicago Day*. Give me the first break, will you?"

He pumped by hand eagerly and stared back toward the highway. I was beginning to get the drift. It had always been like this. Every time something broke that would prove of nation-wide interest, we reporters flocked in like farmers to a threshing. I liked Williams' look. He was young, clean-cut and at least he recognized me from my photo in the *Express*.

Grinning, I dragged him hurriedly along the hall and into the laboratory.

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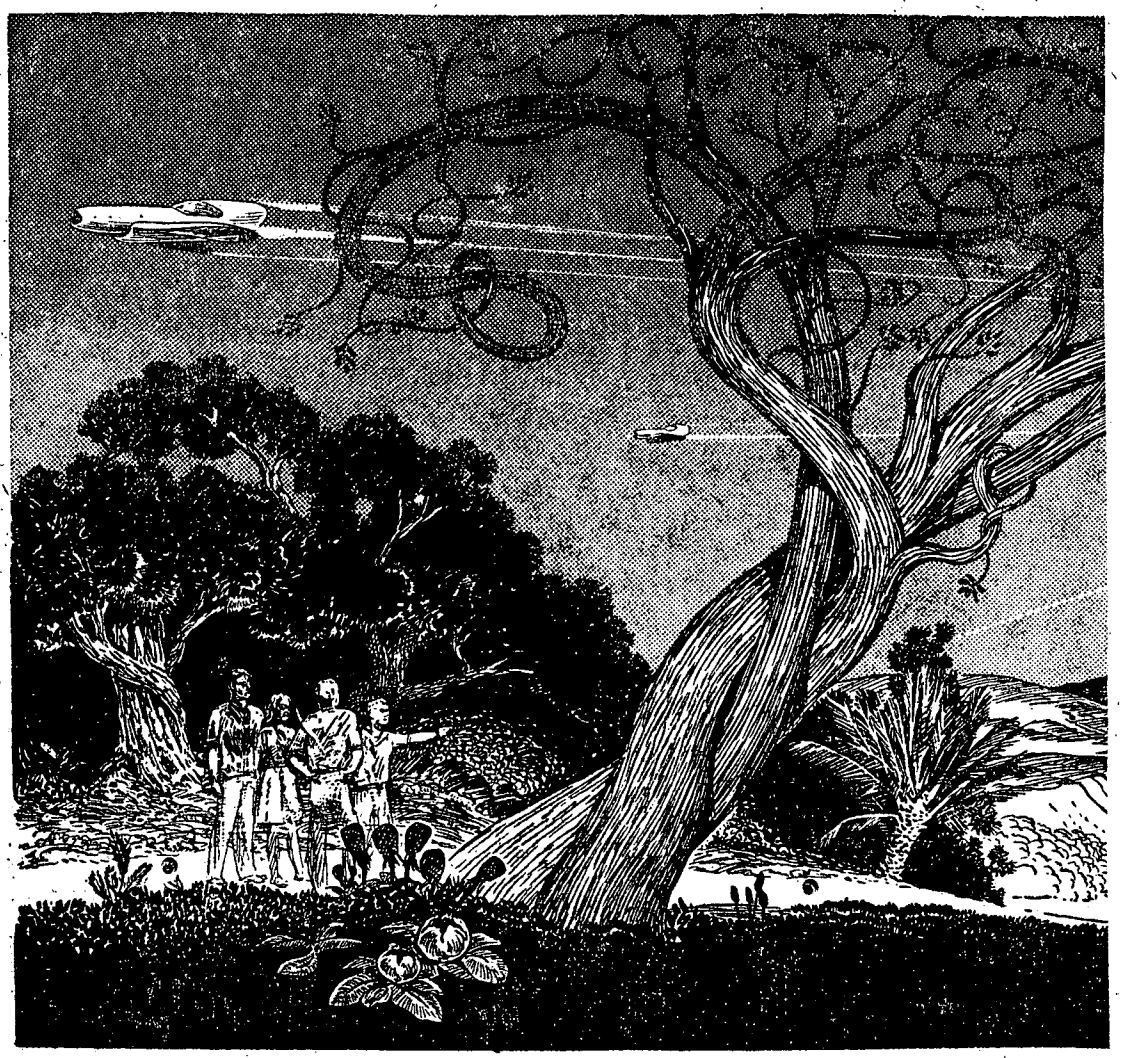

It was a strangely beautiful scene that they gazed out upon with

Crocket looked up from the machine and came toward us.

"I think I'm . . ."

"This is Williams," I said, "a reporter from Chicago. He's the first of a long line of bums who will try to rush us for the next few days. Pull down the curtains and lock the door. Tell Williams everything you want published and don't come out until he has the whole story."

Crocket's eyes twinkled. He turned to Williams.

"It seems you've impressed Mr. Sharp," he said.

Williams was like a kid with a new train.

"Golly," he pumped my hand again, "you're all right."

"No," I disagreed. "But I was a cub reporter once. Santa Claus gave me his first interview, and I never forgot it."

I went into the hall and slammed the door. I heard Crocket slip the bolt in place. By the time I reached the front lawn, reporters were all over the place. Cameras clicked and someone howled:

"Hold it, Sharp. Let's get one as you

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the city off in the distance and the ships rocketing overhead . . .

open the porch door."

I opened the door and walked out. It was a nice feeling. This was the first time I'd been in *front* of the cameras. There were a dozen cars in the yard. *Life* had a man sitting on the roof of the cabin, getting an angle shot of the whole scene. Someone asked where Johnson was murdered. I pointed to the spot.

"Get those buggies out of line with my camera," the photographer on the roof yelled. "Pull one sedan up and open the door like it was when Johnson's body hit the dust."

"Where's the murder car?" the *Herald* man asked.

"Down at the cross roads," I said. "Ask for Pinky Robin. He'll charge you a quarter for each pic."

That was my idea, but I figured Pink could use the spending money.

Willard, of the Twin Cities *Gazette,* a man whom I had heard a great deal about approached me.

"Now that the dust has settled," he asked, "where's Crocket?"

I had been waiting for that.

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"I have allowed one representative to interview Professor Crocket," I said. "When he comes out he'll type his story. He's a good kid and I'm letting him phone his stuff from here. You boys will get carbons of what he has to say. You can send your stories from town. He'll have a ten minute start on you. It's a kind of revenge I'm getting for what you all used to do to me."

Willard chuckled.

"I heard you were pretty slick, Sharp," he said. "Okay, we'll wait."

Life clambered off the roof, put away his plates and caught me.

"I need some shots of you and Crocket together," he said. "How about some laboratory shots?"

"Crocket will be out later," I said. "Photograph him, but ask *me* the questions. He's a busy man."

"But the lab," *Life* protested. "I've got to . . ."

"Can you take pictures through a locked door?"

"Okay," he said. "Don't get hot about it."

I SPENT an hour satisfying the press about what we were doing. Then Williams came out and typed his story on the porch. He gave everyone copies of it, and God, did he feel proud. Then he made his phone call from the hall and labeled the story "Exclusive."

I imagine his editor, waiting in Chicago, chalked up a nice pay raise for the kid.

The yard cleared, with the exception of *Life*, who waited to record Crocket on film. Ann came up from the lake, looking wet and lovely. *Life* paid more attention to Ann than he did to Crocket.

(I might add that Ann, still dripping and lovely, was featured on the cover of the following week's *Life*. Crocket and I "also ran" on page forty.)

CHAPTER XI

Ann "Remembers"

IF WE thought the reporters were to be our last visitors, we were wrong. If the story I had written hit the world below the belt, the influx of tourist trade hit us in the same place. Inside of twenty-four hours Lake Speer was the most popular spot in Minnesota. I mentioned that an old camp was located at the far end of the lake. It was made up of dilapidated cottages, owned by Lake Speer farmers, and rotting with years of unuse.

Every cottage was rented. Pinky Robin became chief guide and transportation chief between the railroad station and the lake.

A tent colony was established.

I confessed that Crocket was planning certain experiments to prove his theory. By late afternoon of the following day, Captain Steele had sent up half a dozen troopers to keep an eye on the cottage. The private road was roped off and traffic on it forbidden. The lake became dotted with boats and one trooper established himself at the beach to keep them from landing.

Under the scrutiny of the world, Professor Crocket continued to work quietly in his laboratory. His light was burning all through the night. Uniformed men sat in the pines outside the windows, smoking and talking in quite respectful voices.

From the Daily Express, Thursday, May tenth—"Professor Crocket's work has rocked the world—Crocket recognized by many as genius—markets low — no buying — world business on thread—reaction varied in different quarters—men of science gather to study and discuss Crocket's findings."

Daily Express—same day—"The police here today questioned powerful

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Wall Street executive, Jeffery Pinchott, concerning murder of Oland Johnson. Pinchott appeared before District Attorney to be faced with photographs of the car he used when in the vicinity of Lake Speer. Powder marks—and . . ." The article ended, "Pinchott was released temporarily. His lawyers laugh at the charge."

Daily Express—May 11—"Pinchott case will never go to court," lawyers say. "Pinchott's reputation is spotless. He seems in no way connected with the strange events that have been taking place at Lake Speer, Minnesota."

The story went on for a full column, rehashing Johnson's death and the *"bogus world"* theory.

Then on May twelfth, the bombshell broke right in my lap. I caught the paper Larry tossed at me as he came in from town. He stood there waiting for me to unfold it and read the headline.

JEFFERY PINCHOTT
MURDERED

It was printed in black, bold-face type that jumped up at me from the front page. I almost dropped the paper. I looked up at Larry, then, before he could speak, back at the subhead:

Jeffery Pinchott, Powerful Wall Street Magnate, Shot Through the Head Today

The story was long, but I read only the first paragraph:

> New York, May 12.—Jeffery Pinchott was shot through the head today, as he rested in his home after an interview with the police. A maid, Miss Janice West, who discovered the body said she called the police at once. Upon arriving, Inspector Patrick McDonald said Jeffery died at his desk. The murder weapon has not been found. An open window beside the desk indicated the murderer's probable method of escape.

There was more. Lots more. Before I could read it, I had to find out if Larry had drawn the conclusion that I had.

I stared up at him.

"That solves a lot of things, doesn't it?" he said.

I nodded.

"Barney?"

He smiled.

"I'd forget the name of Barney Slocum, if I were you," he said. "You told me Slocum said you 'wouldn't be sorry' the night he escaped. You also told me that he seemed to be a 'good sort of fellow.' Well, I'd say only this. Barney is a killer. He didn't like Pinchott, because Pinchott was your enemy. Maybe he did it for you. Maybe he did it for Ann or the Professor. Anyhow, it's done and it's the only way there was to bring Jeffery Pinchott to justice. The law couldn't fight his millions."

"But they'll catch Barney," I said. "Of course, we're jumping at conclusions."

He shook his head.

"I don't think so. Who else would dare walk in on Pinchott like that? No, it was a good, clean fast job. That's the way Barney Slocum works."

SO THE day passed, and a couple of hundred more "campers" came to the lake. The place was a madhouse. You couldn't walk to the lake without feeling a hundred eyes on you. Ann had borrowed a typewriter from Steele's office. We converted her bedroom into an office and she was hard at work trying to sort and answer some of Crocket's flood of mail. Twice a day Pinky Robin drove up from town with a mail sack full of it.

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But now I had a new interest in the mail. Somehow, sometime, I expected to receive a communication from a murderer.

May thirteen—Crocket was still in the lab. He didn't sleep at all, the night of May twelfth. I told him about Pinchott, but he seemed unimpressed. He's thankful for the police net around the cottage as he can't stand interference now.

His only comment on Pinchott was:

"Dead or alive, he couldn't stop us now. We are on the verge of a terrific discovery."

I left him alone and went into Ann's room. The typewriter was clicking a mile a minute. As I passed Larry, he was talking on the phone. He kept a direct line open with the office and handled his work by long distance telephone.

Ann looked up when I came in. She was tired but excited.

"You should see what you two are doing to men's minds," she said, and tossed a handful of mail at me. "The world's turned upside down, and what are you going to do about it?"

I sat down opposite her and opened half a dozen envelopes.

I started to read.

"Gentlemen:

"As secretary of the Gary 'American Legion,' I must protest against the material you are causing to be printed throughout the nation. We have men in our chapter who fought in the battles of France. They came home wounded and exhausted from a war that will never be erased from their minds. Can you tell us that bullet and shrapnel scars do not exist? Can you tell us that we *dreamed* that we fought a war? We demand an apology, to be printed in every paper in the world."

"Gentlemen:

"I ain't so good at writing, but I'm a lifer in the State Pen at Newcastle. They got me here for murdering a guy twenty-five years ago. How in the hell could I murder a guy, if I wasn't even around here twenty-five years ago? Please do something about getting me out of here.

John Scrawbuck."

"P.S. My buddies are giving me the laugh, but they just ain't educated."

"To Crackpot Crocket:

"A bunch of us kids have got a swell Tarzan Club and we read all the Tarzan books and agree that they give us a true picture of the glorious past. We demand that you apologize to Edgar Rice Burroughs for saying that there wasn't any Tarzan and that there wasn't *anything* on earth when Tarzan went around in the trees and rescued pretty girls in sarongs.

"P. S. We don't care about the pretty girls, but we all took a vote and we agree that you're all wrong about Tarzan."

I READ a last letter from a refugee in New York. He wrote poor English, but his idea was sound.

"Why don't you tell Stalin it ain't worth fighting for? Maybe he'll quit."

There was a touch of humor in these letters, but I didn't see them. I saw only the little people of the world, fighting for something they all believed in. Their arguments were sound, so far as they knew. Every one was angry.

We had to do something to prove to them that they were wrong, and at the same time give them a world worth fighting for.

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"They're all like that," Ann said, when I finished. "Thousands of them. I keep writing. "Wait—we'll prove to you that we are right."

"We will," I said, and stood up. Pinky was coming in with another bag of letters.

Ann looked distressed.

"Johnny," she touched my hand. *"Can you?"*

I had tried to make her believe. I had failed.

"Wait," I said, "until Crocket's ready. He's devoted his life and sacrificed his reputation on this thing. He's sincere, and brilliant."

She sighed.

"I only hope he's intelligent enough to get you out of this mess and leave something for me when it's all over."

I guess I knew how she felt. I had given up a good job and pushed our marriage date into a hazy future. Ann had proven that I was the thing she wanted most of all. I hadn't been very considerate of her.

"Pinky came in and tossed the bag on the floor.

"Good Lord," he said, and mopped his face with his shirt sleeve. "I never figured on being a mail-man. I'm getting rich off you folks. Collected a hundred bucks in car-fare and tips since yesterday.

"What's going on down at the camp?" I asked.

He whistled.

"About a thousand people are meeting and talking about you people," he said. "Some of them are curious. Some of them want to know what's going on and are getting damned mad because they don't find out anything."

He looked sheepish.

"Anything for my bulletin service?"

I said: "What?"

He stammered.

"Bulletin service. I've made up a mimeograph sheet telling everything I find out up here. I sell it at a quarter a copy at the camp."

Pinky, I decided, was no dunce.

"You can say that we are handling letters with great dispatch, that Professor Crocket will have something definite to report within the next week and that the police have already arrested three people who tried to break through the lines."

Ann looked as surprised as Pinky did.

"Is that a fact?" he asked.

"No, it isn't," I admitted. "But it will probably keep them away. They don't want to go to jail and miss anything that might happen."

After Pinky had gone, I went down to the lake-front. Boats, dozens of them, floated lazily out by the diving raft. Some of the people in them were mere curiosity seekers. Others wore good clothing and appeared to be uncomfortable enough to be the "higher-ups" of the social world.

It was sort of a flagpole sitting act, in boats, each contestant waiting to view the mysterious happenings at the cottage.

I had told Pinky that Crocket would soon have something to report. God protect us, if he didn't.

"N. Y. May Fifteenth—A meeting of the World Congress of Science, last night, voted to send a group of five representatives to interview Professor Crocket. Though doubtful that the man is more than a police protected maniac, scientists admit that his theory is interesting enough to demand immediate investigation."

I was reading aloud, at the dinner table. Steele was there and Larry, Ann, the Professor and myself. Crocket looked tired. He hadn't slept for three nights. He listened gravely.

"I think we'll prove a match for

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them," he said, when I had finished. "We'll try the first step of the experiment tonight, if Ann is still willing to go through with it."

Ann, it proved, was so darned tired of the whole thing that she would do anything to prove or disprove the theory, once and for all. It was decided that we would enter the laboratory at eight o'clock. Steele promised that extra men would be on duty. Steele, I believe had grown as interested in the experiment as any of us. He obtained Crocket's permission to be present at the time.

Steele had been temporarily stymied by the Johnson case. His men were working on every clue. The tire marks in the mud, which Pinky pointed out, checked with Pinchott's borrowed car. Although he was unable to close the case completely, he was firmly convinced that Pinchott's death had solved the murder.

"And Pinchott is in the hands of the Devil and the New York police, so that part of the crime is settled."

I found a letter from Barney while going through the afternoon mail. It wasn't signed. It was written on a plain sheet of paper and cancelled in New York.

> "I guess you don't have to worry about Pinchott any more. If you ever get a crack at that other planet, and decide to take the trip, let me know. You can reach me through a personal in the *Express*. signed—The Guy you bashed in the face.

Professor Crocket came into the laboratory. He carried a large pitcher of ice water which he placed on the table near the *Memory Finder*. Captain Steele was frankly curious about the machine, as he had been told nothing, and had picked up little information at the dinner table. Of course, I had previously explained the theory of the machine to Larry. Ann not only knew what the machine could do, but was waiting anxiously to prove that the Professor was all wrong in his thought sequence.

"Because," she explained," "you simply cannot convince me that this world didn't start in a crawly, oozy stage and gradually work up to its present power."

I was worried about placing Ann at the mercy of the machine, in spite of the Professor's promise that no harm would come to her. I remembered what had happened to him, and hoped that nothing would slip during the first carefully planned experiment.

He thought it best to explain to Ann just what would happen.

"You will feel a drowsiness coming over you. Don't be frightened. Go to sleep relaxed and don't try to fight the power of the *Finder*. You will be conscious of talking of everyday things. You'll feel an urge surging through you to tell anything that comes to mind. That part of the experiment affects the forward part of your brain.

"If, when we have placed you under full power of the machine, you want to talk, and yet can think of nothing to say, don't fight to go on. Simply relax. You won't know when your subconscious mind takes over. You won't remember a word that you repeat."

Ann was rather light hearted tonight. First, I know that being human, she felt proud of herself for being the center of attraction for so many men. Secondly, Ann thought that now she would prove to us that we were on the wrong track. That we would take our medicine, admit that we were wrong, and return to normal life. That meant a

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lot to her. I could see it in the misty look she gave me as the Professor assisted her into the box.

IT GAVE me a start to see her lying there, still and a little pale. She was determined but uncertainty crept into her expression and remained there, unspoken.

Crocket placed the metal bands on her wrists and on her right ankle. He attached the wires to the machine.

"I am not trying any hair brained scheme," he said, mostly for Steele's benefit. "I've used the machine before, but never on another person. Last night I tried to go too far. Even my brain, which is more easily controlled because of long training, could not stand the strain I placed on it. I'll take no such chances with Ann."

Steele ran his finger around the inside of his collar and cleared his throat. He knew that, in his position, if anything serious happened, he would be held responsible. However, Steele was curious. He recognized in Crocket the touch of a genius.

"I'm just a bystander," he said. "I'll be glad to see this cleared up, once and for all, regardless of what decision you come to. Perhaps we can get some peace from this flock of human locusts who have swept down on the neighborhood."

The Professor nodded. He smiled.

"I have more friends than I ever hoped for," he said, "thanks to the intelligent handling of my papers by Johnny."

Larry Keen stood just inside the lab door. Steele crossed and stood by the window. Ann moved in the box.

"Please hurry," she begged. "I may change my mind if you don't."

The lab was very warm. The curtains were drawn. Crocket turned the switch and the emerald tube started to quiver, turned over and gained speed. Ann closed her eyes. Her lips were pressed tightly together. I reached down and touched her fingers. She took my hand in hers and held on tightly.

"I'm sleepy," she said, and her hand relaxed, falling from mine.

The tube spun crazily now, and the emerald liquid faded and turned several colors in quick succession. The halo of blue appeared over the tube and Professor Crocket switched the dial until it pointed to 1942.

Ann's voice was low but strong.

"I met Johnny this spring. He's the sweetest . . ."

I felt the blood mounting to my face and Crocket switched the dial to 1941.

"New York is cold this spring," Ann said. "Think I'll take a few days off and try Florida."

1940—1939—back—back.

Crocket switched the dial swiftly, getting only a short sentence on each year, to convince himself that Ann actually remembered. The room was getting hot. Steele wiped the perspiration from his face. His expression was tense. I looked at Larry. A smile played around his lips.

1931—1930—

Ann's voice was still clear, though it was obvious that she was in a deep sleep. Her entire body was relaxed. Every time Crocket moved the dial, words came readily to her lips. She spoke of little, unimportant things that are important only at the time they happen. Crocket was very busy every second. He hovered over the machine and watched the light changes that came. A deep purple halo quivered above the whirling tube. Liquid swished rapidly from end to end, and the motor was hot, humming loudly.

1929—1928—

"Guess I *will* have to take higher

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math at school," Ann's lips said. "I love the work. Dad says I can go to New York if I pass."

Crocket's fingers were on her pulse. He looked first at me, then at Steele.

"No danger," he said coolly. "She's perfectly normal."

He switched the dial back once more.

"1927 is my big year," Ann said. "I have my first party dress. It's very pretty . . ."

ANN would have been eight years old then. She's twenty-five now, having been born in 1919. Her memory was vague, as a child's memory usually is. She talked of her school experiences. Her excellent marks in grade school art. Then, back to 1926—1925.

She hesitated, then blurted:

"Momie, I can't remember . . . yes . . . I'm six years old today. The cake is pretty—six green candles."

Crocket took a long breath. He switched the dial to 1925.

Ann's lips moved. No sound came from them. Beads of perspiration moistened her face. She seemed to be struggling for words.

A five-year-old girl should remember—something.

Crocket ignored the others. He looked straight at me. There was a triumphant smile on his face. I heard Steele leave his place by the window and move slowly, silently toward me. Larry's hand was on my shoulder.

Ann's body stiffened. She was trying—trying to remember something. Anything that occurred in 1925.

"A world that has existed twenty years," Crocket whispered, "cannot supply memories beyond that time."

This was our first link of proof, and yet it frightened me. I stared down at Ann's still, almost lifeless body.

"I—I don't know," my voice faltered. "Perhaps she really can't remember. She was very young."

"No," Crocket said. "You can all remember little things that happened before you went to school."

Steele's voice interrupted.

"I can remember quite clearly," he said, "my first boots—age four."

Crocket turned up the power. The motor hummed louder and the tube spun faster. Ann's body went rigid.

Crocket's voice sounded uncertain, as though he didn't quite dare . . .

"I don't know how much power she can take," he said.

Ann was quite rigid now. I remembered Crocket's lifeless hand on the edge of the box.

"I think she's had enough," I said.

Crocket leaned close to Ann's lips.

"No memories," he said gently. "Nothing—nothing about Mother or Daddy?"

Ann's head moved ever so slightly from side to side. Her mouth opened but no sound escaped.

"It still doesn't prove anything," Larry Keen said. I had the feeling that he was trying to convince *himself* that it didn't. It wasn't what he really believed.

I turned to Larry. It was a long chance.

"You knew her when she first came to New York," I said. "Didn't she ever mention any childhood incidents?"

The others turned hopeful eyes on him. Larry struggled with his own memory. Then his face turned red.

"Good Lord," he said softly, "as a matter of fact she did. She used to tell me quite often of her Grandparents. It seems they had a dairy farm in Northern New York. She lived there between the ages of three and five. She could remember the impression her Grandfather's huge herd of cattle made on her."

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Crocket bent over the box.

"Ann," he said gently, "Ann."

Ann's fingers moved.

"Ann you remember your Grandfather's farm? All the cattle. A big farm where you lived."

Silence — dead, intolerable silence hung over the room like a foggy curtain.

"No farm," she said quite distinctly. "No Granddad—no farm."

She sighed, as though giving the whole thing up for a bad job.

"No nothing."

CROCKET sprang the motor switch. He cut the power and the tube slowed to a stop. My eyes were on Ann's face. To my relief, her eyes opened. Color flowed back into her face. She started to get up.

"Just a minute," Crocket said. "Do you remember an incident that you mentioned when you were asleep? Something about enjoying the company of your grandparents? Living with them and being impressed by their herd of dairy cattle?"

Ann smiled.

"I do have a memory for the oddest things," she said unsuspectingly. "Remember, Larry, my telling you all about Grandfather Wiggins and his big farm?"

Larry nodded. He couldn't trust himself to speak.

Crocket released her from the ankle and wrist bands. He helped her out of the box and she gave me a pleased smile.

"I hope that proves something, once and for all," she said.

Crocket chuckled happily.

"It proves," he said, "that you didn't remember any such thing as a farm. Larry told us about it and we tried to help you along. Ann, my dear, by your own confession, nothing happened to you before 1925. As you expressed it, 'no Granddad—no farm.'"

Ann turned to me. Her eyes swept around the room at Steele, and at Larry Keen. The blood left her face and she fainted.

"I thought we'd need the ice water," Crocket said, and reached quickly for the pitcher.

CHAPTER XII

Barney Slocum Dies for Fifty Grand

STEELE insisted upon going under the machine the same night.

"Because," he said, "one test won't be enough. You'll have to test every screwball that comes along, and get the President himself to sign a paper stating that you're not crazy. Others will refuse to believe."

Crocket was overjoyed at Steele's proposal. He had anticipated Steele's argument against the use of the machine, and now that Steele was on our side, it would help a great deal to convince others.

He tested Steele's memory. Steele mentioned his police work, and talked a great deal about his schooling. As in Ann's case, Steele's mind became a blank when the dial was set on 1925. Even Larry, hard-hearted editor that he was, seemed visibly impressed this time. The working conditions were much the same. The room had grown much warmer and Steele ceased to struggle, his subconscious mind telling him that it was useless to try when Ann had failed.

But it was Steele that enabled us to clear up much of the mystery. Even Crocket refuses to attempt to explain, though it's something that has troubled us since that night.

We were about to turn off the machine, to return Dan Steele to normal,

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when a strange thing happened.

His lips did not move. His mouth was open and a strange hollow voice came from his throat.

"Wait—I, Xerbes claim that it can be done."

Ann, standing tensely at my side, pressed closer, her nails cutting into my arm. Larry Keen was so startled that he jumped backward, almost falling. I looked at Crocket. His eyes were lost in a mass of wrinkles. His fists were clenched.

"Good Lord," the words were breathed softly. He sprang to Steele's side. The Captain was rigid. His body seemed a dead, white thing. Yet the voice came from his mouth again, echoing and pounding against the walls of the little room. It was a voice from a huge soundbox. It was as though it came from a vast cathedral.

"The experiment may sound fantastic," it said, "yet Yanu and the High Scientists will find a way."

Up to this point, I had felt as though the inner brain was speaking. Now this theory was lost, because another voice came. *A voice entirely different than the first.* It echoed, as did the voice that called itself Xerbes. Yet it was different in tone quality.

"And I, Unar, claim it cannot be done. Man will not conquer his environment. The planet of Moneta is a complete world. We have lived here from the 'O' age. We live by the things that we found here, developing only as those first blessings are developed and improved."

Then the first voice again:

"We will make a wager. We will prove that you are wrong. The High Scientists, under my leadership, will construct a false world. It will be enlarged by the machinery at our control and thrust into space. On this world we will construct ruins. They will be buried at several levels. In addition, there will be books, *ersatz* materials, in fact, enough bogus history to intrigue the minds of those who go there."

"Wait," the voice of Unar interrupted. "What of the people? They will retain memories of Moneta."

I looked at Crocket. He was torn between duty and curiosity. We all knew that Steele might be dead. Perhaps this was the very voice of death. Yet, none of us moved. *We could not move.*

"No," Xerbes thundered. "I will not lose this wager by forgetting important things. Each human who is set down on this eratz world will be put under one of our Memory Machines. All memory of Moneta will be wiped out. Into each mind will be placed a complete, personal history. Books, even living quarters, will be constructed to dovetail with these memories."

Another voice came in, as though we were listening to a strange radio play. A radio program came from the white, motionless lips of a seemingly dead man.

"AND Xerbes and I claim that these people, at least a percentage of them, will be intelligent enough to discard the hopeless jigsaw puzzle of history that we place about them. These higher ones will understand, when they have wasted many years in study, *that no one can completely solve the mysteries of such a world.* They will struggle through mists of uncertainty and find their way back to Moneta *and their rightful home.*"

A great volume of voices arose, some of them cheering, some defiant.

"This is a mad, foolish scheme you have concocted," Unar's voice boomed.

"But," Xerbes cried, "you, Unar,

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claim that we are bound by environment. That we live according to the conditions about us. I say that we can master environment and ignore it. That we can rise above it. I say that the people of this false world we create, will realize that their past does not make sense. That they will muddle through and come home to us, and I will collect the wager."

At this point, Steele's lips started to twitch convulsively. His body stiffened. Frightened, I jumped forward and turned the switch of the machine. It went dead. Crocket and Larry were at Steele's side.

For a moment I thought we were too late. Then Steele relaxed once more and blood found its place in his cheeks. He opened his eyes.

"I'm—I'm thirsty as hell," he said. "Jeez . . ."

His voice died, but his breathing, his pulse, were normal.

In five minutes he was out of the box and able to be moved, with my help, to the porch. The others came out one by one, and silently took their places in the porch chairs. Ann was silent. Larry Keen kept muttering to himself.

"Well," Steele asked. "I hope I didn't disappoint you?"

Ann sighed.

"You—you knocked my performance right off the first page," she said.

Steele looked first at me, then at Crocket.

"I had no memories beyond 1925?"

Crocket shook his head. He seemed to be in a daze. He had never expected anything like the performance of the *Memory Finder*.

"Good Lord, man," he said, breathlessly, "you acted like a human radio. As near as I can guess, you tapped a knowledge of the past that no man has a right to know. I don't know if it was you or the machine."

Eagerly he told Steele what had happened. When he was finished, he sat very still. The moon was high over the lake. Boats were still out there on the lake, half a dozen of them. A couple of troopers were playing cards under the gleam of a flashlight on the lawn. It was a very quiet night. A very warm one.

"I guess you turned out to be a prophet after all," Steele said finally. "But how in the devil can we contact this Moneta, that we are supposed to return to?"

Crocket shook his head.

"The work has only begun," he said. "We'll have to convince others that we are right. That, alone, is a huge task. Yet I think it can be done."

"Amen," Larry Keen said. "So help me, I'll publish every word of what has happened. God pity me when the public gets hold of *this* news."

I looked at the troopers, enjoying their game of gin-rummy.

"A lot of people are in for a rude awakening," I said.

"Maybe," Ann said timidly, "we'd better travel a little further on the road to Moneta before we try to convince the public that such a road exists."

Ann was right but I knew I had come a long way toward success in convincing *her*.

THE full story of the *Memory Finder* was printed in the *Express*. To my surprise, I now found that although the Johnson estate hadn't been cleared up as yet, Larry Keen and several of his associates owned a controlling share in the paper. Keen had accumulated stock over a period of years, and at least for the present, he was in full charge of the paper's policy.

I kept notes from this point on, because I realized that what was hap-

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pening would make a startling journal, once Professor Crocket succeeded in closing the last chapter of his story. As some of the events that took place are slightly hazy now, in view of what has happened since, I present them as I wrote them during those seven wild days that followed.

MAY 20—By noon on the day the *Express* carried its third great story of Professor James Crocket's work, Lake Speer became a maddened beehive of humanity. Steele had to rush down to State Headquarters and requisition extra troopers to keep order. I rose early and Crocket and I held a hurried conference in my room. Ann's typewriter was already clicking, trying to dig its way down through the huge pile of letters.

Crocket is looking older, tired and yet more sure of himself than ever.

"We have convinced a few intelligent people. Our work has ceased to be a theory, and is a fact," he said. "Now—we must actually develop a machine that will transport some of us to Moneta."

Moneta. The name was rich, musical. I never doubted that the planet of Moneta existed. Xerbes—Yanu—Unar—the voices that came from Steele's lips, were real living people.

"I'm still a little dazed about last night," I admitted. "We've come across something that's too hot to handle, and yet we can't stop now. There isn't any trail back."

Crocket nodded.

"That's it exactly," he agreed. "To admit that we were dreaming up the facts that we've given the public, would brand us both as fools. We have a choice of being fools, or perhaps, prophets without honor. Are you going on with me? It's not too late for you to get out."

That brought a smile to my lips. Get out? He couldn't get rid of me now no matter how hard he tried.

"The voices mentioned that we would find our way back *home* to Moneta. They must have given us some clue."

Crocket nodded.

"They did," he said. "I told you once this had been my life work. It took ten years to perfect the *Memory Finder.* I managed to do something with it that I thought was impossible. Don't think that I thought only of contacting the planet called Moneta. I knew I would have to go there, if such a road opened for me. I have an attachment which fits on the *Finder.* I have used it often to carry brain waves out of my body to distant points."

"Wait a minute," I begged. "I'm a reporter. That sounds pretty complicated."

Crocket smiled.

"Any task is complicated to a man who does not know how to perform it. Remember that I have worked on this for many years. The brain waves or thought waves can do everything but actually *see.* They have to *see* by sense of vibration. In a state of coma I have been able to send all but the actual brain substance to any given point. When I awaken, I have filed away in my head certain events that my brain waves have seen or picked up at that distant point. *With enough money I would be able to go further. I would be able to actually send the brain itself and perhaps the entire physical body.*"

That is the wall that we have run into. Enough money? How much? Crocket estimates twenty five thousand dollars.

I HAVE talked with Keen. He flew to New York this morning and got back late this evening. I asked him

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if he knew any rich *angel* that might back us. Seated at the table with half a cup of coffee in his hand, he grinned wryly.

"I know a number that might *hang* you," he said. "The big boys are after your neck, and Crocket's, for that matter. They are trying to suppress any news from here. They've succeeded in buying the *Herald,* but I won't sell the freedom of the *Express.*

"New York, in fact, the whole outside world, is sitting on the fence. Everyone is afraid that if Crocket *should* turn out to be correct, the old world would topple like Humpty-Dumpty and break into a thousand pieces.

"The stock market, food prices, everything is way off. Everyone is waiting for Crocket to kill himself or get taken to an asylum. Still there's just enough sense in his story to make them wonder."

This is very discouraging.

"What's the news so far as a general reaction is concerned?" I asked.

He pushed a copy of the *Express* toward me.

The headlines hit me in the face.

PROFESSOR CLAIMS CONTACT ESTABLISHED WITH MYSTERIOUS PLANET

New York, May 20—From Lake Speer today came the report that in the presence of reliable witnesses Professor James Crocket succeeded in . . .

The article covered most of the front page. The only other story that broke in was a review of what had been done to date to apprehend Jeffery Pinchott's murderer. It took up a half column, offering fifty thousand dollars in cash for the murderer, dead or alive. Valuable clues had been found and the police were expecting results within forty-eight hours. Pinchott's money, I decided, was still powerful enough to wage a battle in the favor of justice. Just where the justice in this case was, I wondered.

"The World Congress of Science has met in London," Larry interrupted. "They are flying a committee here by clipper. They'll demand a hearing with Crocket the day after tomorrow."

That *was* valuable news. Perhaps they would stand behind us. Larry dashed this thought to pieces.

"I might add," he said, "that those boys are ready to believe anything but the truth. It's like trying to find a cure for the head cold. No one has ever done it, and they wouldn't believe it if it happened."

May 20 closed with no further news from outside. Down at the camp, a group of sightseers spent the evening in a community sing. Troopers were getting fed up on gin-rummy and had switched to poker. Ann worked late on her mail and I went to bed. I had a headache that aspirin wouldn't cure.

May 21—It happened today. Tragedy, and a perfect solution for Crocket's problem. In the eyes of the public, I'm a hero. In my own mind, I'm still doubtful as to whether it was worth it. I had no choice. Fate played me in on her hand, and I came home with the chips.

I went swimming early this morning, hoping to escape the thrill seekers who were now practically living in their boats. Yesterday's paper created quite a stir at the camp, and Pinky Robin sold out all the copies of the *Express* he could find in town at a dollar a copy.

As a result of this I had to give up the swimming idea. I didn't want to go back to the cottage. There were a

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lot of things on my mind that needed pondering over. I walked along the beach, then into the woods away from the direction of the camp, hoping I could escape anyone who might have seen me leave the cottage.

I had reached the cove where Barney Slocum found his boat. It was warm and the trees swept close to the water's edge, forming a screen to hide me from the lake. I sat down on a log and stared into the water. I thought I heard a gunshot far away on the other side of the lake. It troubled me for five minutes. Then I forgot it and dozed. Suddenly the roar of a motor sounded over the calm lake. I hadn't heard a motor for some time. The sightseers used rowboats.

I sat up, scanning the water, trying to discover the source of the sound. Then I knew why the motor had startled me.

It was Barney Slocum's boat.

IN THE flashing sun, I saw it slip into open water, gain speed and come hurtling directly toward me. Two more gunshots sounded faintly in its wake, then only the motor could be heard. I was about to get out of sight. The man in the boat stood up. He was steering with one hand.

It was Barney Slocum.

I couldn't be wrong. I remembered the first time I had seen him standing in a speed boat, guiding it with one hand. He was cocky and very sure of himself.

The boat was already half way across. Then another craft came into sight. It was smaller but evidently propelled by a heavy motor for it gained slowly, cutting down the distance between the two.

I waited. Slocum drove the speedboat straight for the shore. Fifty feet out he cut the motor and got ready to jump.

I had the wild idea that he was trying to get to the cottage. That he felt his safety depended on his reaching us.

I could see his features clearly now. There was blood on his dark face, but he was grinning. He wiped the blood away and as the prow of the boat hit the sand he jumped. He fell, got to his feet quickly and then saw me. The grin widened and he laughed aloud.

"Johnny," he said, "my God, this *is* a welcome surprise."

The other boat was half way across the lake. It was aimed like a bullet straight toward the cove. I could see two figures in it.

They were Troopers.

Barney's face had been creased badly by a bullet.

"You shouldn't have come back," I said.

He just stood there laughing. Yet, he was gauging the speed of his pursuers carefully.

"Crocket needs some dough for that last job he's got to do, don't he?" Barney's voice was calm now. It was insane, the way he stood there, watching the Troopers as they came closer.

"Get the hell out of here," I begged. "I'll tell them you aimed a gun at me and kept on running. Hide in my room at the cottage. I'll think of something."

He grinned.

"Nice going, Johnny," he said, "but you don't think these boys could catch me if I didn't *want* to be caught?"

His voice was scornful.

"I don't understand," I confessed.

"You and Crocket—and Ann were pretty nice to me,' he said. "You've been the only decent people I ever met. There's fifty thousand bucks waiting for the guy who brings me in, *dead or alive.*"

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The whole plan was beginning to seep through my brain.

"Barney, for God's sake? You didn't . . . ?"

The Troopers were almost in now. They had cut their motor and were drifting.

They couldn't see us in the protecting screen of trees. They were standing low in the boat, pistols drawn.

"This guy Pinchott was a bum," Barney said coldly, "even if he has got money. You guys ain't bums. You done something for me. Maybe this is a chance for *me* to do something big too."

It wasn't a time for heroics. I grabbed him by the arm and pushed.

"Run," I said. I felt choked up and sick inside. "They'll shoot you down. Barney, run, for Christ's sake."

He jerked away from me.

"I'm all done running," he said grimly. "I ran all the way from New York, just to beat the law up here."

His face was gray and expressionless. He was very tired.

"You ain't gonna spoil things now. I ain't just thinking of you. I'm thinking of Ann and the Professor. He deserves a break."

ONE of the Troopers shouted from the boat. I thought I recognized Dave Walters' voice.

"Come down to the beach with your hands up, Slocum," he yelled. "We're landing."

Slocum shot me a last desperate look.

"Play ball, Johnny, like I want it."

I swallowed.

"For Crocket's sake," I said, "and Ann's."

A ragged smile showed his white teeth.

"Good boy," he said softly and pulled a pistol from an armpit holster. Before I knew what he had done, he whipped up the barrel of the gun and fired directly through his own heart. He sank to the grass without a sound.

The boat hit the beach and Dave Walters jumped out. Hardly knowing what I was doing I picked up the gun. I held it loosely in my hand. Dave Walters ran toward he, stopping short as he saw Barney's body before me on the sand. He whistled.

"Looks like you hit the jack-pot," he said, "and with me so close to making some real dough."

His companion came up on the bank, bent down and turned Barney's body over. I let them take the gun from my hand.

"Nice job, Mr. Sharp," Walters said. "He was a tough baby."

I looked down at Barney. The smile was still on his lips.

"Play ball, Johnny, like I want it. For Crocket's sake—and Ann's."

I remembered what he said, the "tough boy" who had come all the way from New York to deliver fifty thousand to his friends.

"Yeah," I said. "I guess he was tough all right. I couldn't miss. He was right on top of me before I fired."

I hated like the very devil to say it. I guess it was what Barney wanted.

CHAPTER XIII

The Final Plan

MAY 22—We made preparations to receive five members of the World Congress of Science. Steele telephoned at ten this morning to tell me a check was on his desk for the sum of fifty thousand dollars. I had already explained to Ann, Larry and the Professor what had happened on the beach. We were all sick about it, and yet, I wanted to erect a monument telling the world what the "tough guy" had

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done because a few people treated him squarely.

Crocket had to sidetrack further work and prepare to receive our guests. Even the airline people were impressed at the importance of these men of science who had winged their way from half way across the world to visit Lake Speer. At one in the afternoon, Steele sent out boats to clear the lake. The beach near the camp was black with people studying the sky for the first sight of the special seaplane that was coming directly from ship's side in New York Harbor.

At one fifteen a speck disturbed the sky toward the South East and the large plane came down to squat like a sitting duck on the water of Lake Speer. A cordon of Troopers escorted the men to the cottage.

It's impressive to see such men. All five of them were well into the later years of their life. One cannot blame them for being disturbed over what they had come to witness. They had spent their lives building up a series of facts that threatened to be torn down over night.

Naturally, to us, their lifetimes weren't so important. Those who had been in the laboratory the night of Steele's brain test, realized that these were actually men of Moneta and had not, as they supposed, life residence on earth.

The names of Farley, Freamont, Bruck, Waterman, and Wells conjure up pictures of great books of learning. The men themselves were quiet, and I think, a little amazed at the great crowds who hovered nearby, many of them already firmly convinced that Professor Crocket was correct.

I will always regret that I was unable to be present for those tests. I learned afterward that Crocket was asked to work with them alone and allow no outsider to comment on what took place behind the doors of the laboratory. Crocket, however, told me what I didn't already know, after they emerged from the laboratory late that evening, and with grim, almost frightened expressions, embarked for the return trip.

One by one they had undergone the test, all in their turn, listening and watching for the results upon his associates.

Not one of them, powerful, stubborn fact finders who tested and retested every inch of the ground, could remember a single incident of their lives beyond the year of 1925.

I came across Ann, seated on the beach, staring at the lonely moonlit water. She turned as I approached and her eyes glistened. I knew that she had been crying. I sat down and placed an arm around her waist.

"Tired?"

I knew she hated people who cried, and I didn't want her to guess that I knew.

She nodded.

"I guess so. There's so much happening. Barney's death—and all."

"I know," I said. "I feel somehow that there is blood on my hands."

She shook her head. For sometime we sat there. It grew cold and I suggested we go in. Suddenly she was clinging to me, her tear stained cheek pressed to mine. There was something frightening in the desperate way she held me.

"Johnny—how is it all going to end? It wasn't your fault, about Barney. *He wanted it that way.* If Barney believed so much in the Professor, and *you* believe, it *has* to be true, all of it."

"I know," I said. "I told the Professor we couldn't turn back. I hope you feel that way."

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She stared up at me, and I kissed her.

"I wouldn't have you quit for anything," she said. "But if we can't straighten things out in a little while, the whole world will be hiding from itself. People will go mad."

I thought of the check for fifty-thousand dollars, lying under a paperweight on Captain Steele's desk.

"Barney donated his life for this," I said. "Tomorrow I'm going to get the money and work my damned head off until we finish."

She laughed, a little wildly.

"To think that as much as Jeffery Pinchott hated us, it is his money that works to prove that we are right."

EVERYTHING seemed a little crazy. I took her to her room and noticing the light in the laboratory, knocked softly. Crocket's voice came from beyond the door.

"Go to bed, Johnny," he said. "There's work to be done here. Work you can't help me with. You've done your part today. Get some rest, and we'll start all over again in the morning."

"Thanks," I said. "Better call it off yourself. You've been under a strain."

"In a short time," he promised. "One or two more things . . ."

His voice trailed off. I undressed quietly and crawled into bed. Every muscle in my body ached. I thought of the seaplane roaring away with five men who would deliver judgment on our very existence. Perhaps they would study the whole thing among themselves and decide that Crocket was only a clever fraud. It wasn't a pleasant thought.

I woke up once close to four in the morning. A shaft of light still touched the pines outside my window. Crocket was still at work in the laboratory.

May 23—The week ended, and for me, the last day started at noon. I didn't open my eyes until eleven this morning, and then cursed myself for sleeping so late when Professor Crocket had worked throughout the night. I went at once to the laboratory, and asked him to stop and get some sleep. He looked very bad. His face was drawn and pale. His hands were impregnated with dirt and he showed signs of collapse. He tried to laugh at me for worrying about him.

"I've assembled some of my machine," he said happily. "Now I must make a list of needed material and you will have to fly to Chicago for them. I've already called the supply houses and asked for the assistance you need."

I called town and arranged for a private plane. At breakfast I noticed that Ann felt much better. A night's rest had done her good.

"Larry left this morning," she said. "He is returning tomorrow, after he finds out how the World Congress of Science reacts to the visit here. He thinks he should supervise the editorial handling of their story."

I was glad of that because Larry would give the news every possible break, unless it was too bad for even him to touch up. I received a long list of equipment from Crocket and asked Ann to see that he went to bed at once.

She promised and I'll admit that at her suggestion, Crocket went to his room like an obedient child. He had lived alone for so long, he thought of Ann as a daughter and a very wonderful one at that.

I waited for Pinky Robin to pick me up and we drove directly to Steele's office. I received the check. I still didn't want to take it, but I understood what the money meant to us and tried to ignore my personal emotions.

The plane was waiting for me at Speer and the flight to Chicago was a

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fast one.

The job Crocket put in my hands was important. I had to contact and place orders for immediate delivery with three chemical companies, a radio supply house and several wholesale houses. I had dinner at the Blackhawk, forgot for a few minutes that I was living in a world apart, and grew anxious to return to Lake Speer.

I had planned at first to stay in the Windy City over night, but now, seeing people dance and sing once more, I wanted more than anything else to get back to Ann.

HOW can I best record the happenings of the next three weeks? Barney Slocum's body was taken back to New York. Larry Keen purchased a decent lot for him and Barney went to rest, never to have his chance to take a trip to "that other planet" he had dreamed of.

Professor Crocket and I labored night and day over the machine in the laboratory. To me it was an intricate system of cabinets within cabinets. Parts, made to his drawings, came by plane from Chicago. Radium arrived in carefully guarded containers. A full case of powerful tubes came in and were fitted into the power chambers beneath the cabinets.

I worked hard, doing the things he thought my hands were capable of. I trusted him entirely, knowing that his mind was familiar with the task at hand.

At the end of the week, the World Congress of Science came from their chambers and released stories to all parts of the globe. It must have been wonderful, that first interview with those men. I would have liked to have covered that story.

With every man, woman and child waiting for them to speak, the silence was broken. The full story of their findings was published in a dozen languages.

It is better for me to include part of the actual article. I cannot explain it, at least to my complete satisfaction.

London, May 30—The World Congress of Science has carefully studied and discussed at great length the findings of a committee that went to Lake Speer, Minnesota, to interview Professor Crocket. It was with shocked surprise that many of us listened to their reports and agreed that something had burst upon the world of knowledge that no man had ever remotely suspected before this time.

We, as a body of human beings, cannot force down the throats of man, a story such as the one we heard, regardless of how much we believe ourselves. Let it be remembered that *in our opinion,* the following facts are true.

1. That man (and this applies to men of our profession more than any other) has been trussed and chained by his environment. That we are forced to react to the world around us.
2. That many strides into a clearer future have been frustrated by the beliefs that tie us to the past.
3. Therefore, it might be better if we could forget a past that does not help us, and work toward a perfect future.
4. That Professor Crocket has produced a miracle of clear thinking and succeeded in convincing us that he is sincere and a genius.
5. That his findings are: (A) A planet of Moneta actually exists. (B) It is the *home* planet of our people. (C) That *world* is an experiment, and that Crocket's previous explanation as to how we came here and why it can be told and how we were supplied with an inexplainable past

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is completely accurate and correct.

6. We cannot say that Moneta is a place that can be reached by any present manner of transportation. We believe this to be impossible. Even the location of such a planet hasn't been determined. However, Professor Crocket believes that he can produce such a machine. In respect to him, the Congress postpones any decision until his work is complete.
7. In summing up this report, the World Congress is forced to discard previous concepts of all branches of research and wait until such time as Professor James Crocket, the man who is guiding the destiny of the world, hands down his final decision.

THE article, though by no means convincing everyone of its truth, did a wonderful thing for the Professor. When he read it, tears sprang to his eyes. Here, in the presence of his fellow workers, he was conceded to be a genius. It sent him back to his laboratory, struggling harder and harder to reach his goal.

There were telegrams of congratulations from all over the world. Several schools of thought sprang up. One of them was the *So-what'ers*. *"So-what?"* was hurled from millions of lips. Actually, these people were trying to comfort themselves.

"So what?" they asked. "We're getting along all right. Environment is here and we've been struggling with it for centuries It hasn't got us down yet."

The answer was obvious. In reaching it, I fell deeply in love with an imaginary vision of Moneta. Here was a planet that would see nothing but the future. Its people would have no ties with centuries past.

In Moneta, we all agreed, no man could point to history and say:

"Wars—we've always had them and we always will. It's like a machine. We go round and round."

One night, Ann, Larry and myself were on a wild fantasy flight to Moneta. We pictured it with tall, perfect buildings of the future. Moneta, Larry said, would know nothing of depression and hatred and wars. On Moneta, with no memories, there would be no hatred to grow until it flamed into a war. There would be no soap boxes and speeches.

The things we spoke of, must have been discussed in millions of homes. Some people made a joke of the whole affair.

To us there was no joke about the existence of Moneta. We fought against time and Larry Keen championed the cause by donating every page he could to the stories we released.

In June, after the World Congress convened until Fall, the big job was done. Throngs had moved in upon us gradually until only the cottage itself and the acre of ground around it could be protected by State Troopers. Campers were everywhere in the woods. They managed to sneak close to the cottage, and we could see them, staring with wide, frightened eyes at whatever movement thy could detect through the cottage windows.

The laboratory was our terminal point on earth. Now the machine was ready. We tried to decide who would first attempt a contact with the planet of Moneta.

Moneta—Even the name made poetry when you spoke it aloud. I would lie awake at night, staring at the ceiling and repeating the name over and over. I dreamed of it. The world of perfection, released from all superstitions, hate and dogma. Soaring onward with new success, because on

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Moneta there would be no fear of the dark—no fear born in childish minds for things not understood.

I became very sorry for us, the people of earth. We had been made to suffer all these fears, simply because people greater than ourselves wanted to perform a large-scale experiment. Finally a cold perspiration broke out on my forehead and a terrible fear arose inside me. *What would happen if we failed in our effort to return to the perfection of Moneta, our home planet?* The thought grew in me like a festering sore. I tried to sleep, but my subconscious mind took hold of me and I lay awake living a nightmare.

Perhaps the machine would fail. Men would look at us and condemn us for frightening them. We would suffer, and in the end, be punished for not proving what we sought to prove.

Worst of all, the world would get no relief. Men would continue to search for turtle eggs and ruins. They would go on trying to solve the missing links that didn't exist. They would fight again and again for a world of peace, and finish each battle, only to await the strength to fight again.

I slept at last, but not until the sky was gray and traffic was once more moving along the road toward the camp.

THE laboratory was dominated by the huge system of black cabinets. These cabinets made up the space in which we would lie, while being transported by Crocket's complicated machine. They were each the size of a small coffin, lined with black leather and fitted with doors that kept the oxygen from seeping in. The six boxes were welded into one, in rows of three each. Metal and rubber tubing connected them with various parts of the machine itself.

It would be impossible to explain Professor Crocket's theory on the action the machine must take. Even I, who had worked on it steadily, knew only that we would lie in the boxes and that air would come to us from tanks. When the machine gained full momentum, it was expected to break down the brain and transport it to Moneta. If Moneta held no oxygen, we would be faced with death within a second after reaching there. That was the chance we had to take. Crocket's figures were based entirely on the art of higher mathematics and the subject was beyond my ken.

To the outmoded *Memory Finder* had been added six larger, more powerful tubes. Each of these contained a different chemical. The smallest contained radium. It was these flashing tubes, and the huge assembly of the radio equipment under the cabinets that would provide the all moving power.

CHAPTER XIV

We Must Remain Calm

WE PLANNED a trial test. For this test Crocket insisted on making himself the guinea pig. He explained the correct method of starting the machine and building up the power until it controlled his body. This time, Ann and I were alone with him. The Captain was busy in town and Larry Keen was midway between New York and the Lake, coming for the final test. Larry had agreed to go with us to Moneta, while Steele promised to handle the machine at Lake Speer.

Crocket entered the first chamber and I posted Ann by the thick glass window that covered the end of it. Our instructions were to wait until Crocket showed some sign of leaving the chamber. None of us were quite

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sure how the transition would take place.

New motors had been placed in the room to drive the big machine. I threw the switch of the first and felt power lunge into it. It gathered speed quickly and the laboratory shook under the weight of it. Within the cabinet, I could see Crocket lift his arm, signaling that oxygen was reaching him, and everything was all right. The tubes started to whirl.

I threw the second switch and the high whine of the second motor blended in with the first. The tubes twisted faster, their various contents swishing from end to end. The base on which they were mounted vibrated and shook the cottage.

Nothing had happened yet, and the machines were going at full speed. I watched Ann's face. She shook her head.

"He's still got his hand lifted," she said.

I was discouraged. Crocket and I had decided that the body would probably disappear slowly at though into a omist. That the cabinet would become empty, and must be left tightly closed until he returned.

The vari-colored rainbows lifted into the air over the whirling tubes. The regular lighting in the room was dim.

The machine had reached maximum speed, yet nothing had happened to Crocket.

His hand was still uprisen.

Discouraged, I turned off the power and waited for the machine to stop. With Ann's help, I unlocked the cabinet and pulled out the wheeled slab on which Crocket's body was lying.

The moment I did it, I realized the terrible mistake I had made.

Crocket's body was stiff and hard. The blood seemed drained from it. By earth standards, he was dead. And I had killed him.

"Don't stop the machine until I signal you to do so," he had warned.

We both had mistaken the uprisen hand as a signal that he was dissatisfied and ready to give up.

What could we do now?

"We'll haave to get him back in," Ann said in a hushed frightened voice. "Perhaps there's still a chance."

We slid the still figure back into place as swiftly as possible. While Ann closed and bolted the door, I sprang to the motor controls. It seemed hours before the motors were in motion again.

I went to Ann's side, staring at the still, marble like figure in the cabinet. No movement—no signal. Probably if life remained, I had murdered him by opening the case—or at least by shutting off the power.

I felt as though there was no hope, yet we couldn't give up. Crocket's life meant everything now.

Ten minutes passed—then fifteen—half an hour. The motors hummed loudly and the tubes were so hot that quickly changing halos of light spun wildly all over the laboratory. Gradually we were enveloped by these lights. The glass that allowed us to look in upon Crocket grew hazy and moist. Then, dimly, beyond the moisture-beaded glass, I thought I saw movement.

I strained my eyes, clutching Ann's shoulder with my fingers.

"Did you see?"

She nodded.

"His hand fell to his side."

Still I didn't dare open the box.

Five more minutes.

Then his foot, close to us, tapped gently on the glass.

I sprang to the motors and shut off the power. The lights faded and died. The moisture on the glass disappeared.

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ANN opened the cabinet. She was crying, and the tears streaked her cheeks. Those tears were born of sheer relief. I know, for even if I had not been able to cry, I felt like it as we wheeled the slab out of the cabinet and helped Crocket to his feet.

"I've been to Moneta." He was quite overcome. *"Johnny, do you hear me? I've been to Moneta. For a while I couldn't seem to return at will. Then I was able to come back."*

"I told him quickly about turning off the machine.

"I'm glad you did it," he said. "I found that I was able to move about with complete freedom on Moneta for a short time. That means that we must have a reliable person at the controls here. By a prearranged signal, we can come back after making a study of life on Moneta. *It's wonderful."*

I was frightened. He spoke of being able to move about in complete freedom.

"Your body didn't leave the case," I said. "You grew stiff and dead from all surface evidence."

I expected this to trouble him but he chuckled.

"I should have told you," he explained. "These bodies we are in are quite useless to us. Only our subconscious minds and our souls are transported by the machine. That is why the cabinets are constructed so carefully. They must protect and preserve the actual body so that we may come back here long enough to finish our work. On Moneta science is far enough advanced to provide us with new bodies.

"I didn't have time to present myself to the people of our home planet. I found myself on a hill near the edge of a great highway. In a distance the towering spires of a huge city reared toward the sky. I had ony time to see that the vehicles on the road, the buildings in that city, were far advanced over our own. I was going toward the city when you restarted the machine. It stopped me on the spot I was standing. When I awakened again I was here."

That was my first trip to Moneta. We faced many difficulties. First, how could we bring back proof that such a place existed? I solved that problem and simple as the idea is, I'm proud of it.

We could only bring back ideas and mental pictures. Therefore, we would gather all the information we could about the machinery, art, mathematics, etc. learned while on Moneta. Upon returning we could present that material to learned men and let them judge for themselves how successful we had been. In a like manner, every phase of life could be copied mentally and reproduced on paper when we returned. If enough people could be convinced that Moneta was really their home and far advanced over the environment imprisoned earth, then machines like the one we had built could be made by mass production. All our finance could be diverted into transporting civilization to a new planet where a perfect future would give men and women a better life.

The plan grew in my mind until I was waiting wildly for the first chance to see Moneta for myself.

Crocket was patient. He had come so far along the right road he hated to take any risks. He went over the machine carefully, making sure that nothing could go wrong. Dan Steele came up and Crocket explained what must be done. Steele, although in danger of getting into official trouble by working with us, had promised to handle the controls and bring us back to

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earth at the end of twenty-four hours. After that we would decide how long we could remain on Moneta, gathering vital material to present to the world.

Larry Keen arrived at eight in the self would fill four of the six chambers on the second trip to Moneta. Steele tightened his guard around the cottage, fearing that some maniac might manage to damage the machine. He was very deeply concerned over his responsibility.

A THOROUGH check-up assured us that the direct power line that supplied the motors could not be cut off by storm or accident. The world was kept ignorant of what we planned to do so that none of our enemies would take this opportunity to get rid of us.

Larry Keen arrived at eight in the evening. He had good news.

"We held a board meeting last night," he said. "The group has raised enough cash to buy a controlling share of the *Express* from the Pinchott estate. With Pinchott himself out of the way, there isn't another power in New York that dares fight us outright. The decision of the World Congress carried a lot of weight.

"People in New York seem very deeply concerned. They are waiting for us and we've got to produce soon."

Ten o'clock was the last hour. From then on we weren't sure what we would face. If an accident occurred, it might not be pleasant. Steele had five cups of Ann's coffee. He joked nervously, like an executioner who dreads pulling the switch to the death chamber.

Larry discussed the construction of the machine with Crocket and finally gave up. Crocket's work was far beyond his understanding.

I tried to discourage Ann from going with us but she insisted.

"We aren't complete unless we're together," she said. "I couldn't wait here and think of your lifeless body lying there in a metal coffin. If I'm beside you it won't bother me at all."

I admitted that I felt the same, and she convinced me that she should be with us.

"Besides," she said, "I can pick up a lot of lovely future dress designs which might come in handy."

We held a council of war at ten thirty.

"We will, because of the power being uniform, and because we start together, probably find ourselves in a group on Moneta. The fact that we find ourselves in a strange world without our physical bodies should not worry us. Our thoughts will be understood by each other.

"During the first trip we will not attempt to acquire bodies. No doubt this has been arranged by the Monetians, but we'll not take advantage of it until we are sure we have all the information we will need here on earth.

"Therefore, Steele will bring us back in twenty-four hours, to the second. We will make our plans when we reach the home planet. Is that clear?"

No one spoke. The others nodded and I followed their example.

Crocket arose.

"Good," he said. "Remember—a lot depends on us. We must remain calm and unafraid."

CHAPTER XV

The Story of Moneta

I LAY quietly in the narrow confines of the black cabinet. Above me the Professor had taken his place. Larry, I knew, was at my right, and Ann above him. Steele slammed the glass

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door to my cabinet and all sound was cut out. I'll admit it was a little frightening. I tried to relax, but my heart pounded unreasonably. It was dark. Only a dim light came from the glass near my feet. The oxygen tank was pumping fresh air into the box. I felt better.

I could feel rather than hear the throbbing of the motors. Steele was doing his job swiftly. I closed my eyes. I wasn't quite sure how much pain was in store for a man who leaves his body. There would be some sensation, I was sure, and I waited for it with a curious dread.

I was in for a surprise.

It was like sleep. A deep, dreamless sleep that comes when a mind and body are exhausted and relaxed.

Then I was awake again, and hovering over a clearing in a small grove. *Was this Moneta?*

It could have been the woods near Lake Speer. The sun was bright and the day warm. I had an odd, disconnected feeling, and well might I have. It was as though my brain floated in space. I could see, and yet I could not feel. *I*, the part of me that was here, had left my body behind.

It seemed that I must only will a thing to happen and it happened. I wanted to explore the grove, and go beyond, where I could hear sounds of moving traffic. I didn't dare to leave until I contacted my friends.

"I assume that we are all here," Crocket's voice said clearly. "Although of course I can see none of you."

I heard Ann's frightened little gasp.

"I've been waiting for you," she said. "I feel fine. I didn't dare to speak out loud, afraid none of you would be here to answer me."

I felt vastly relieved.

"I'm all right," I admitted. "Although, without a body, I can see complications arising."

Larry chimed in.

"They'd have a hell of a time waging a war on earth, if everyone was as helpless as we are," he said.

Crocket sounded well pleased.

"Good—we are all here. Now, to lay definite plans for the hours we are to remain on Moneta."

Larry chuckled.

"I hope Steele remembers to pull the switch," he said. "Otherwise, I want to be damned sure that they've got a body stored away for me somewhere in this new world."

He hit pretty close to the thought that worried us all. I would hate to go through life with vibrant, lovable Ann Shelton and be able to accompany her only in spirit and voice.

MENTALLY, I had already gathered many notes concerning Moneta. Our conference in the grove had been short. Crocket and Larry, or at least their mental equipment, decided to go together toward the city of spires we saw some distance away. There they would try to absorb construction details, dress designs, etc., that would impress earth people. Ann and I were to take our time exploring the rich valley that approached the city. Here we would listen to the people when possible and find out what we could to tell the people at home.

It was a wonderful experience. We had no fear of being discovered for actually there was nothing to be discovered. Knowing little of the brain and the soul, I can explain it best by saying that our mental machines were on Moneta with no physical body to delay us. We had but to wish ourselves onward to a certain point and we were there without delay.

We agreed to meet in the grove well ahead of the time set by Steele for our

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return. In this way we would make sure that no errors occurred.

Ann suggested that we go first toward the road, for we still heard vehicles traveling on it. As Larry and Crocket had already left for the city, we started at once.

This valley of Moneta was a wonderous place. If this planet is as large as the world, I thought, how can so much man-made beauty be accomplished? Yet, hadn't we decided already that Moneta was far advanced?

The highway which we approached was perhaps a hundred yards wide and its surface was as smooth as glass. The cars, for I suppose you could call them that, were propelled by powerful, soundless jets of pale blue gas that shot from the rear of the slim vehicles and vanished into the air. Speed here had been conquered, for we could hardly follow the vehicles without mental "eyes" as they shot past. Moneta was well settled, for the highway was covered at all times with a veritable tidal wave of traffic. A thousand yards away, another road carried traffic away from the city.

We drifted toward tthe valley, following the wide thread of the road. There were no farms here. Instead, colored glass homes were scattered about on green squares of grass. Moneta seemed a planet of color and light. The sun filled every house through soft, pastel blocks of glass. Each building was separated by several hundred yards, and the roof of every home acted as landing space for tiny, bug-like planes.

We were unable to speak to the inhabitants, but we saw many of them that afternoon. They looked as the people of earth do, and it was a relief to me. I had half expected some sort of four-legged green men. That's the usual conception of life on other planets.

These people of Moneta looked like your Uncle Ned and your Aunt Helen. However, their dress and their living conditions were far advanced. We saw nothing that would point to a country that lived in the past. Most of all, that was what we had come for. Environment, we were sure, had never touched here. In searching the homes, we saw that books, papers, everything spoke of and looked to the future. Nothing was wrinkled with age.

Yet this did not account for the worried expressions of the faces of the people we saw. We regretted that we could not break in on any of their conversations, for by their speech, they might give us some clue.

The people of Moneta, in spite of the jewel-like setting they lived in, were worried.

What worried them we couldn't guess. Yet, when they gathered in groups near their homes, or read their papers, it was evident that their minds were filled with a troublesome thought that they couldn't drive out. It showed in bitter little lines around their mouths and in the corners of their eyes.

UNABLE to fathom the secret, we hurried back to the grove. Professor Crocket was worried about our continued absence.

"It is very near the time for Steele to take us home," he said. "I was afraid you might not get back."

We sat and waited. The wind was warm in the grove. We were all excited over what we had seen.

"That city is perfect," Larry said with enthusiasm. "It's got everything. Elevators work on compressed air, shooting the cars three hundred stories aloft. The sun up there is wonderful. Every office absorbs it through ultra-

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violet screens."

"Even the basements," Crocket added, "are fitted with sun-reflectors that carry the heat and ultra-violet rays of the sun to the lowest levels. There couldn't be any disease."

"The cars that you saw on the road belong mostly to the workers." Larry couldn't forget the things he had witnessed. "Through an ingenious arrangement of road levels a man can drive directly to his building through a service door and be lifted while still inside his car, to a garage on the floor level where he works. No man or woman is more than a few steps from his car at any time."

There were other wonders, but I noticed the sudden look of uneasiness that showed on Professor Crocket's face.

"One thing worries me," he admitted, and I knew it was the same thing Ann and I had felt. "The people of Moneta aren't entirely happy."

"You know," Larry added, "I didn't say anything at the time, but I had that same feeling. They look nervous—as though they were afraid of mentioning it and yet couldn't get whatever it is off their minds."

I told them quickly that Ann and I had noticed the same thing.

"I did overhear one bit of conversation that might have applied," Larry said. "It was between a couple of men who worked high in the office system. One of them said:

"If they *do* find anything, it would affect the whole system!"

Crocket thought for some time, then gave up, as we had been forced to do.

"I don't know what it is," he admitted, "but never fear, we'll get to the bottom of the mystery once we come to Moneta to stay."

Come to stay?

It had a nice sound to it. Clean, super cities—colorful utopias in hidden valleys.

Then a strange emotion passed through me, and I was homesick. Homesick for the dirty, paper-strewn streets and the noisy traffic of New York. Homesick for a bowl of chili and a beer at Brett's Bar. We of earth are foolish, tradition bound people, but the thought of walking across Times Square again had a good feel to it. Poison spouting automobiles were screaming their mechanical lungs out. Men and women were spitting and breathing in each others faces, where the sun seldom shone. Perhaps we were meant for that life, and not for the perfection of Moneta? I wondered.

The returning sensation was very pleasant. One moment we were busy talking over what we had seen and locking it all carefully in our memory. The next, a strange drowsy sensation passed through us all and we awakened feeling heavy and a little strange, once more locked in the bodies we had left on earth. I was still unaccustomed to my load when Dan Steele, relief showing plainly in his eyes, helped me from the cabinet of Professor Crocket's wonderful machine.

THE day after our return to earth, Larry Keen insisted that all four of us fly to New York. We went at once to the offices of the *Express*. I noticed a strange, subtle difference in the city, since I had gone to Lake Speer. Laughter had vanished. Everyone looked frightened. Unanswered questions were on every man's face.

What would Professor Crocket have to say to a curious waiting world?

In the art department, each of us was turned over to a staff artist and a reporter. It felt fine, giving, instead of taking a story, for a change. For

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three hours, I made suggestions and answered questions shot at me by both men. I knew that Crocket, and Ann were doing the same thing. Larry was in his office, hard at work with the top artist in town. When he emerged, the entire city we had visited on Moneta would be on canvas.

I explained the general appearance of the valley, the homes, and the living conditions. The artists worked hard, checking with each other concerning details. At one o'clock in the afternoon, the work was done. The *Express* tomorrow morning would carry the complete word and picture story of Moneta in it's pages.

Every copy was sold out in advance.

By three in the afternoon, tele-photo had reproduced every sketch and sent them all over the world. Professor Crocket gave technical explanations of how many of Moneta's marvels were based on theories never before suggested by earth scientists. These facts would prove beyond a doubt that no one man could invent the story. We knew that men and women would read and believe what they read. That was important.

CHAPTER XVI

I Satisfy a Terrible Doubt

I'LL never forget the day that followed. *At last the world believed.* There was no doubt this time. Crocket had impressed the World Congress, and now every man of any importance stepped forward to fight at his side.

At nine in the morning the President of the United States read a short address, broadcast in seven different languages to all points in the world. I will never forget his closing words.

"There is no doubt that James Crocket has discovered a secret that has held us bound in tradition for centuries. I cannot comment on whether this is good or bad. I don't care to express myself on a problem that concerns the people themselves, and therefore should be answered in each mind according to that person's own common sense. However," he paused, "I have talked by trans-oceanic telephone with London and Moscow. We agree that Professor James Crocket is a man who has been working for the betterment of civilization. He will be interviewed by a committee chosen from the United Nations. If he wishes to share his knowledge with the Axis nations he will be given that privilege. Perhaps the people of earth will demand a mass migration to the home planet of Moneta. I cannot make such a decision. It is up to you. There is plenty of time. Think well, America, and you of other nations. This may be your opportunity to find a warless Utopia. It may bring happiness everlasting and allow you to escape a world that has not been a very happy place for many years."

That was all. It was a straightforward speech. I had no doubt about the decision that people would reach sooner or later. Moneta was too appealing—too wonderful to miss. Perhaps only a few would go at first. Then, when others saw their friends moving into a Utopia they had all dreamed of, they would follow. The world would be left, an isolated crude globe, spining in space. Four footed animals and creatures of the water would come into their rightful heritage and rule a manless world. . . .

But first I had a task to perform.

Perhaps it was my newspaper training that would not let me rest.

Professor Crocket spent the next two weeks rushing from one conference to

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another. He was in London on Monday, and when Thursday came around, we received a cable from Cairo.

"Meeting Russian, English and African officials here," he said. "Mass migration system planned. Machine all set for production in seven key cities."

Inside of another month, Crocket's machine would be on the assembly line all over the world. Perhaps, if nothing occurred to stop the plan, earth would be deserted before another Christmas came around.

But Johnny Sharp has a nose for news. It isn't an exceptionally pretty nose, but it gets around and Ann Shelton likes it. That's why, on Saturday night, after we heard that Crocket was enroute to China to meet Chiang Kai-shek, she and I retreated to the laboratory at Lake Speer and carefully locked the door. I explained once more how the machine was operated, found myself locked in one of the upper cabinets and waited for Ann to pull the switch.

I had one more task to perform on Moneta, before Crocket launched his full scale migration to that planet.

To my wonder and delight I came to Moneta when light was hanging like a dark velvet over the valley. Never have I seen anything to compare with the sight I saw from the edge of the highway. The city, in fact every dwelling in the valley that approached the city, was glowing with colors of the rainbow. I suppose it was caused by the colored glass that these homes and offices were constructed of. Pale greens, blues, pinks—every shade of spectrum danced and reflected over the darkened countryside. Above, the sky was bright with strange stars that of course I hadn't yet become accustomed to. I had no idea, nor did Crocket, where Moneta was actually located, in relation to the other planets. Our problem had been one of mental travel, rather than flying.

WE COULD face one question at a time, and once the population of earth came here, they would find out the answers to questions as yet unexpressed.

But the valley *was* perfect and everything about Moneta pleased me more than it had during the first trip.

But I had a job to do and do it I must. The future would depend on my research on Moneta. I couldn't fail.

I searched carefully that night, fighting my exhausted mind to go on—to listen for some word that would confirm what I thought I knew.

Close to morning I found the solution.

I followed the highway away from the city—far from the valley we first saw. I travelled through other valleys and visited other cities, each more perfect than the first. Then a sight met my eye that made my heart pound with excitement.

I wasn't sure of myself. What was I actually looking for? I left the highway and hurried toward a single ugly scar in the surface of the planet. I knew the answer was within my reach.

Perhaps a half mile from the road, I saw a deep excavation. When I reached it, I saw that it measured about a mile long and half as wide. It went deep, and at the bottom, I saw rugged stone, upthrust from the soft dirt. Men with baskets on their shoulders toiled up steep slopes from the hole. They dumped their dirt on screens, where others sifted the stuff carefully, occasionally removing bits of rock and other material.

I dropped down, coming close to the men at the screens. They worked slowly, painstakingly. Their eyes were narrowed with excitement and their

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faces showed the wonder that was in their minds. I could hear two of them, one a very old man with white sideburns, talking urgently as they worked.

"I think this bit of stone will date back to the quartz age," he said. "You recall our Professor mentioning that the quartz workers were excellent warriors?"

The young man had keen eyes and long, searching fingers. He took the bit of quartz eagerly. His voice was high pitched.

"This is wonderful." He sounded so deeply impressed that I wondered if the work was new to him. "It will shed new light on our ancestors."

New light on our ancestors. But, I thought, you have no ancestors. That is what makes Moneta such a wonderful place. You should not delve into the past. You should look to the future or you will become bound by environment as surely as earth men have.

"Take my word for it, Herod," the old man said, "we will dig deeper and we will find the secret of the Wars of Piras. The men of his age fought brilliantly. It will be a feather in our cap if we show the High Council how Piras fought. His technique was flawless."

Wars on Moneta? It was unthinkable. Here was Utopia, untouched by bloodshed.

Yet this was why I had come back. It was the thing I had feared.

I left the pair and went into the depths of the pit. Here, other men grubbed in the dirt with small spades. They arose occasionally, picking up slabs of rock. On the rocks were incriptions. Messages from the past. Messages that had intrigued men of earth and *tied* them to the past.

I could hear the people of Moneta, when they found out that during other ages, a man named Piras had made war a glorious pastime, fighting it for the pleasure derived from killing.

"We have everything," they would say. *"Yet are we happy? There have been wars before. Perhaps we should take things from our neighbors as Piras did. Perhaps war is inevitable. Perhaps we were not meant to escape it."*

I shuddered. I was dreaming and yet, was I? The men and women of Moneta were worried. About this?

A VOICE close by startled me and I turned to see a bearded ancient arise with a strip of rusted metal in his hands. He held the thing aloft, shaking it in both hands. His voice was shrill.

"What will those milksops of the Peace Legation say when we place this wondrous weapon on their desk? What will they answer when we say:

"This is the battle sword of Piras, and we can dig more truth from the planet's surface. We can dig until we prove that Moneta has a heritage. A wonderful heritage to be preserved at any cost."

They flocked to his side, hiding him from me, but I heard one of his companions speak:

"The councilors fought to make us give up what they called *useless scraping at the surface of a virgin earth."* he shouted. "Now the council will find that we have a past. A past of wonderful wars and savage nations. This excavation will become the first sight of *true* knowledge."

Disgust filled me. It made me want to run back to the spot where the machine had placed me and wait for Ann to take me home.

I was witnessing the beginning of the end of Utopia. The people had become curious. They had succeeded in building wonderful things, because they had not been chained by wars and heartaches of the past. These men I watched

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were spoiling for all time the opportunity that Moneta had to be the perfect planet.

I knew now that I was correct in guessing the reason for so much unhappiness. The people waited anxiously for knowledge these men were bringing to the surface.

Moneta, I knew at that moment, would be no better and no worse than earth. Men should not come here, for they would face the very things they sought to escape. Professor Crocket had been right, but now, because Moneta had forgotten the very reason for its success, it was doomed.

For man has fortified himself behind the complete alibi. He found a reason why he should fight wars.

He knows that it has all happened before, and instead of fighting against these conditions, he remarks smuggly that history repeats itself.

Moneta had a history now, and it was sure to repeat itself.

I turned away, blind with anger against the men in the pit.

I faced the greatest decision of my life. It wasn't pleasant, but there was no other way to prevent the vast migration plan from going through. Ann understood me and forgave me for what I did.

I knew that I could not undo the things that had been done. Professor Crocket was so firmly entrenched that even if he denied his own story, people would say that he was selfish and would go ahead by themselves to establish new colonies on Moneta.

I had one escape. I wired the full story to Crocket, telling him what I had found out and how I had decided to proceed. It was sent in code, as the President and the Army approved of my plan. I received his reply at once, saying he would leave by clipper, notifying all the leaders of the world of his actions.

Then I called Larry Keen. We spent seven hours sweating out the story that might spell the end to the *Daily Express*.

Of course this story was circulated throughout the world and the people were furious. In the long run, people forget and forgive very easily. Professor Crocket joined Ann and myself. We packed quietly, destroyed the machine and ran away to a remote lake north of the Canadian border.

Crocket was deeply hurt and yet he realized that men of science knew the true story. It was only the people who believed the article Larry and I had prepared.

For we had announced to the world that Professor Crocket was mad. That we had been taken in by his story, until, on our own initiative, we had tried out his machine. We exposed Moneta as being a product of the Professor's warped mind, claiming that he convinced us through mass hypnotism.

Larry wired us a week later, and the wire was delivered to us with the supplies that came in by canoe:

"New York has forgiven *Express*. Circulation up hundred percent. Congress of Science has full story and wants Crocket on their staff in London. You and Ann better stay hidden for month. When you return New York, have job Managing Editor for you. I'm moving into Johnson's office. Kisses to Ann.

Larry."

CHAPTER XVII

Memory Is Elusive

NEEDLESS to say, Crocket left at once for London. Before he went out with the guide, Ann and I were married. I forgot to mention that the

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guide was Father Jeffries, a priest who lived at the remote trading post.

Ann and I stayed out our month with pleasure.

When we left the lake, Ann had a huge scrap book of new designs, all taken from Moneta and her people.

We visited Barney Slocum's grave a few days later, and I stood there with my hat off, talking to Barney like a kid. I told him everything that had happened and thanked him once more for being a great guy. Ann was crying when she placed a bouquet of roses near the headstone.

"I wonder if he'll like them," she asked softly. "He wasn't really such a tough guy."

Moneta, since those days, has grown into another Lost World story. Occasionally the subject comes up in some Sunday Supplement, but the *Express* steadfastly refuses to comment on it in any way. Crocket is deep in research work now, but he depends on Moneta for most of his scientific theories.

I received a long letter from him last week. The letter caused me to publish this account. In part, this is what he had to say:

"Moneta is still alive. Behind locked doors, Waterman, Bruck and myself have worked stubbornly with the *Memory Finder*. We managed to isolate and bring to earth a man of Moneta. We placed him under the *Memory Finder*, hoping to find out once and for all what really happened in years past on that planet.

"This will amaze you. The man spoke clearly and intelligently upon several subjects, yet failed to remember anything about the earth experiment. *When the Memory Finder was set back to 1925, his mind became a complete blank.*

"This leaves us exactly where we started. Moneta has no history, beyond the time that earth people can remember. Can we, on this basis, say that both Moneta and earth face the same problem? It sounds incredible, but are both planets an experiment, perhaps conceived by a third, still more perfect civilization? I shall spend my life trying to find out. The thought is perhaps beyond the end of the trail that my mind is capable of following."

The idea frightens me. How far must we progress, to find the perfection we seek? If we did find it, would we be entirely happy?

"What a book a devil's chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horribly cruel works of nature."—Charles Darwin.

THE END

MECHANICAL BRAIN

By J. R. MARKS

A MACHINE that can solve three problems at once "enlisted" for the duration and helped to win the war for the United States. It was invented at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This machine can solve in one day a problem that took one mathematician and several students 50,000 man hours to solve.

This machine eats up the tape. It takes one man to feed in the tape that has the problems punched on it. Then a maze of wires, electronic tubes and motors and shafts does the rest. During the war this machine made the range tables for big navy guns, and it helped in the study of cosmic rays and atomic waves. Now in peacetime, bridge designers are using it to find out exactly where the stress and strain will fall, and it can be used in many other practical ways to take some of the load off human brains.

* * *

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READER'S PAGE

A GREAT ISSUE, BUT—

Sirs:

After reading the December issue of FA I felt I had to congratulate you. It was a fine issue, even though I know some fans won't agree.

Now for my one gripe. Maybe I'm wrong, but I think too much love interest is creeping into stf. The "Toka" story was swell, but why so darn much love in it? I don't think it is necessary in order to have a good story, because in my opinion, Toka would have been a good yarn without it. I have nothing against sex, but I think that most fans will agree with me when I say that it doesn't belong in stf to such an extent.

I liked all the other stories, but "Perfume For A Princess" and "The Hands Of Ali Jinnah" were super. As usual, Finlay had the best illustration. He's my boy! Cover was pretty good—very lovely blue sky. I see that the reader's section is getting longer. Swell! It's been too short for too long. Stories are improving, as is your magazine in the last few issues. Keep it up and maybe I'll put you back in first place on my list.

Linda Blake,
635 Schifferdecker Ave.,
Joplin, Missouri

Your comments on the love interest in stf are interesting, Linda. But how about the rest of you fans—what do you think? Anyway, we're glad you liked the issue so well, and just want to ask you a question. Who is first on your list? We're so darned proud of FA that we don't think there's a fantasy magazine that can touch us. But, of course, we're a little prejudiced! And, oh yes, we'd like to apologize for the brevity of the Reader's Page this issue. Just didn't have room. But we'll make up for it in the future—so keep those letters rolling in and we'll print them.....Ed.

SETTING A HIGH STANDARD

Sirs:

In my last letter to your publication I panned a story and expressed the fear that FA was slipping. In this letter let me retract that statement. You are not slipping—far from it, you have lived up to the true and real standard I have come to expect from FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

In the December issue I would like to list the stories with some apology to Shakespeare.

"Toka Fights the Big Cats"—Much ado about nothing.

"The Devil To Pay"—A Midsummer Nights Dream.

"The Hands Of Ali Jinnah"—Comedy of Errors.

"The Gift"—As You Like It.

"The Warder And The Wampum"—The Merchant Of Venice.

Let me also thank all the fans through your publication for their letters. Due to circumstances I have not been able to answer them all.

Keep up the good work, and FA shall always have one fan who will never miss an issue. . . .

Hyman M. Sachs,
2449 E. 22nd St.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

You don't have to apologize about Shakespeare to us, Hyman—we're glad to be mentioned along with him! But, seriously, just watch the coming issues of FA, and we'll bet you'll see an even higher standard being set!.....Ed.

CALLING ALL TOKAS

Sirs:

I would like to know how many "Toka" stories have been published in past issues of FA.

I would like to ask any readers of FA who have any back issues of "Toka" stories for sale to please get in touch with me.

Keep up the good work, Ed. . . .

Robert E. Patka,
4856 N. Moody Ave.,
Chicago 30, Ill.

WANTS SHAVER EVERY ISSUE . .

Sirs:

I have just finished reading your December issue of FA and thought I would contribute my opinion of your magazine.

This is the first time I have ever written fan mail to any magazine and I've been reading stf for over five years.

J. W. Pelkie's "Toka Fights the Big Cats" was very good, and the cover painting was exceptionally good, "Perfume for a Princess" by Elroy Arno was also very good.

Couldn't you manage to get at least one story by Richard Shaver in every issue of FA? You said in your December isue that Shaver had two hundred fans. It is two hundred and two, including myself and my brother.

Lee D. Quinn should hang himself or herself. Shaver's stories would not be so interesting if they should be definitely proven impossible. And besides, Quinn, how do you know they're not true—can you *prove* they're *not true?*

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Fiction comes from fact. I'm not saying that every line in Shaver's stories is true, but some of it is bound to be. There are many mysteries that seemingly cannot be true, and yet cannot be explained in any way.

Beverly Jean Walker,
39 Virginia Ave.,
Groton, Conn.

Thanks a lot for sitting down and writing to us, Beverly, we're always glad to hear from our readers. You mention that we said Shaver had only two hundred fans, in the December issue of FA. We're sure that if you read it over again you'll see that we said the "critics" of Shaver number about two hundred. Shaver's fans are well up in five figures. How many other science-fantasy writers can boast that today? As to Lee Quinn, well maybe Lee will be able to answer you himself. Ed.

A SWELL YEAR FOR FA

Sirs:

I wish to congratulate you on your two swell magazines, FA and AS. This has been a swell year for them—especially FA.

I would like to give you my top eight stories of the year:

1. "Forever Is Too Long"—of course.
2. "Toka Fights the Big Cats"—welcome back.
3. "Princess of the Sea"—unusual.
4. "Witch of the Andes."
5. "The Red Dwarf"—good with no cave stuff.
6. "Lamp of Vengeance.'
7. "Secret of Elena's Tomb."
8. "Goddess of the Golden Flame."

The best cover was for "Witch of the Andes." And, of course, the best humor stories are the 'Toffee" series. I'm glad the back covers are back. And, oh yes, I'd like some pen-pals under 18. I am 13 myself. Thanks for a good year.

Bill Searles,
323 Acacia Rd.,
West Palm Beach, Fla.

We'll be watching for your ratings next year at this time, Bill, because we think we've got some really great stories waiting for you.....Ed.

YOU FIGURE IT OUT!

Sirs:

I have just finished reading J. W. Pelkie's "Toka Fights the Big Cats." It was very interesting reading all the way through and I enjoyed it very much. "Perfume for a Princess" was also very good but slightly out of this world, don't you think? But as I read the story and got deeper and deeper into its plot I could almost imagine myself as being Herbert Coates there with his pal. Lela must have been quite a dish.

I've heard a lot about "The Secret of Elena's Tomb" and if it is as good as they say it is, I would like to get a copy and read the story.

I have been reading your magazine whenever I I can get my hands on a copy, and most of the stories hold my attention clear to the end, and then I sit and wonder, could these things really happen? I'll let someone with more brains and talent than I figure that one out.

Thanks for a very fine magazine.

Arthur Gurke,
Neche, N. D.

You are not the only one who sits and wonders sometimes, Art. And as to that question, could these things really happen? . . . Well, it wasn't so very long ago when rockets and atomic power were looked on as nothing but tools of the fantasy writer. And look at the world around you today. Rockets . . . atom bombs, and we're only beginning. So when you read a science-fantasy story, it's all right to have your tongue in your cheek, but remember, that some of the things that are written about in fantasy stories have happened! .....Ed.

AWAITING THE THARN SEQUEL

Sirs:

I enjoyed "Toka Fights the Big Cats." But the front cover was the worst it's been for quite a long time. I just couldn't digest the blue sky or the background.

The choice of stories was readable this time. I especially liked Dwight Swain's novelette. I'll close for now, saying that I'm anxiously awaiting the "Tharn" sequel. "Warrior of the Dawn" was one of the best stories I've ever read.

James W. Ayers,
609 1st St.,
Attalla, Ala.

To say that we're a little bit surprised to hear that you didn't like the December cover would be putting it mildly, James. We thought it was one of the best Jones covers yet! . . . We'll present the "Tharn" sequel as soon as author Browne delivers the completed manuscript. He's hard at work on it right now!.....Ed.

YUM AND DOUBLE YUM

Sirs:

The December issue of FA was very good. I liked "Toka Fights the Big Cats." It was a very interesting (yum) story, and very well written (yum-yum). All I have to say about the Zolandian women is, "Daddy, buy me a dozen!"

"The Devil to Pay" is one of the few Unknown-type fantasies I have read since the unfortunate demise of that magazine. Let's have more stories like it. The deCourcys are o.k.

The cover was excellent, but then, it usually is. How do you get that almost photographic clarity? It's really remarkable.

Joe Schaumburger,
1822 Bathgate Ave.,
Bronx, 57, N.Y.

We gather that the "Toka" story whetted your appetite, eh, Joe? Well we had the same feeling too! And kep your eyes on future issues for some more top fantasies. .....Ed.

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SCIENTIFIC ODDITIES

By LYNN STANDISH

THE GIANT REDWOODS

MOST of the giant sequoias are in California. In King's River Grove there is one tree 276 feet high. In Calavaros Grove there is one 325 feet high. The tallest tree, 365 feet, is dead but is still standing. It is as high as a thirty-five story building. These trees are not only known for their amazing height, but for the thickness of their trunks. Roadways have been cut through some trees with enough room for two cars to pass side by side. One tree may contain enough lumber for building twenty-five six-room houses. These old trees could tell quite a story if only they could speak. Some are believed to be more than 3,000 years old. They were growing when Rome was just a village. They were standing when the Norsemen and Columbus were coming to America, and they are still standing majestically today.

* * *

THE BUTCHER BIRD

THIS bird has a short, thick bill, the upper half curved and furnished with a tooth, and the lower half with hairs. They live in the northern countries and grow to ten inches in length, and are usually grey and white. These shrikes prey mainly on large insects and smaller birds, young snakes, frogs and fish. Those that they do not eat at once, they stick on a thorn or a splinter in order to keep them. If they are in a cage they will use a nail or a wire from the cage. This practice probably originated in an effort to hold their food firmly while tearing it apart.

* * *

"TOMATIN"

SCIENTISTS have found a chemical in tomato plants which they named tomatin, that is capable of resisting fungus disease. It fights the germs responsible for ringworm and athlete's foot. So before too long the treatment for fungus diseases may involve tomato plants or even pepper, cabbage or potato plants, for they also contain this chemical. It's worth has been proven in the test tube, and now clinical tests to prove its value are under way.

A TWENTY-TON HEAD

ANOTHER enormous head, the fifth, has been dug up in southern Mexico. It was unearthed by a joint expedition of the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian Institute after laying in the jungle for more than a thousand years. These well-carved heads are relics of the "La Venta" culture of 500-800 A. D. This came before the Mayan and Toltec civilizations. It is a puzzle as to how the twenty-ton heads were transported to this spot, for the basalt from which they were made was quarried seventy-five miles away.

* * *

THE ICE AGE

THOUSANDS of years ago, great masses of ice covered most of the earth. The exact reason for these glaciers is unknown, but a professor in the University of California recently offered this theory: He thinks that the snow fields can be self increasing, that they become larger because the white snow surface reflects most of the sun's heat so that the region becomes colder and the snow turns to ice. The air over the ice mass gets cold and dry. Then the warm, moist air from the ocean blows over the ice and the moisture falls as rain and snow and freezes in till all the oceans are partially emptied to become ice on the land. When there is less water in the oceans, there is less atmosphere to evaporate, and the situation is reversed. The ice age gradually ends. Ten thousand years ago was when the last ice age ended. Who knows when it will happen again?

* * *

FUNERAL FEAST

NOT all customs following a death are of a melancholy nature. For instance there is the wake that is quite common all over the world. At such times the people may dance and play games. After the body has been taken care of, it is the custom for the mourners to sit down and eat a good meal. This ceremony goes back to the time of "spiritual cannibalism." Savages thought that the eye was the home of the soul, and so when an old chieftain died or was slain, the next ruler would eat the eye of

(Continued on page 166)

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What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

Not For General Distribution

Sincere men and women, in search of the truth —those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for a complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to Scribe W. N. Z.

The ROSICRUCIANS
[AMORC]
San Jose California

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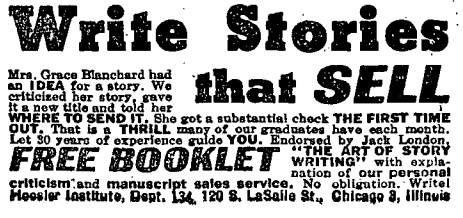

(Continued from page 164)

his adversary. In Rome, the nearest relative would stand by the bedside of one about to die, and inhale the last dying gasp. In this way he was able to acquire the virtues of the expiring soul. In Bavaria the people ate "corpse cakes" at the funeral feast. The bread dough was set on the corpse to rise before baking, and acquired his virtues which were passed on to the people eating the cakes. Sometimes there is a special chair set at the table of the feast to be occupied by the dead. This is in case the ghost is still in the house and wants to be treated as one of the family. After the meal, the spirit's food is thrown under the table or out the door to indicate to the ghost that he has had his last meal there and should leave the land of the living.

A noisy, boisterous wake is based on the idea that it is sinful to remain silent in the house of death. If one should go to sleep from drinking too much, he is in danger of having his soul enticed away by the soul of the dead as they meet in his dreams. Some people believe that the dead take part in the games. The corpse should be watched at all times to protect it from the demons that are always lurking in the house of death.

* * *

SALT OF THE EARTH

SALT was once so valuable that people thought it was a sign of bad luck to spill it. In some parts of the country it is still a luxury because of its scarcity. Old phrases like "not worth his salt" show that salt was considered valuable. Salt was also used to show social distinction. People at banquets were divided socially by their seating arrangement in relation to a single salt shaker in the middle of the table. Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper" shows this old superstition of bad luck by showing Judas Iscariot spilling the salt.

* * *

ANCIENT WELCHERS

WHENEVER we think of the ancient Egyptians, their manners, their gods and their modes of worship, we are inclined to take an extraordinarily respectful air. We tend to think of them as a great people who created a profound and sincere religious cult. An attitude like this bears looking into.

If a closer examination is made of the Egyptian religious establishment, it will be noted that there is one outstanding, glaring fault to be found. The Egyptian was a victim, if the term may be used, of a peculiar sort of self-righteousness. He was the most intolerant of mortals. No other ancient people so believed that whatever they did was so right. This in itself, is more or less understandable, except that the same attitude appeared within the

(Continued on page 168)

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To People Who Want to Write

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(Continued from page 166)

structure of the religion itself. Thus the ancient Egyptian had a peculiar moral code in that while it sounded to an outsider extremely ethical, within it was very loose. Honesty, truth, respect for the rights of weaker people, real love of the gods, love of home and wife—all these virtues were very loosely interpreted. A close examination of the inscriptions on the tombs of the long dead Egyptians produces some interesting if embarrassing results. These inscriptions make it clear that the Egyptian regarded only as wrong, something which caused positive physical injury. Moral principles were not recognized. It was assumed that if you injured no one physically, you were a good man. Moral right was not believed in.

In addition, the writings on the tombs make it clear, that fear was all that motivated the ancient Egyptian into doing what was really right. Everyone left records of the most self-laudatory kind, making it clear that the person in question had always treated everyone in the kindest manner, had never abused servants, and thus had the magnificent tomb as a just reward. It is astonishing to us that people even at that time could be so fundamentally wrong in such a naive sort of way. The sense of wrongness, of sin, of moral injury to one's fellow man that has become a part and parcel of every decent person in the world, almost instinctively, had no counterpart in the ancient Egyptian. If he could cut his neighbor's throat, and do so unobserved, he was sure that the gods would not punish him in the after life. Perhaps it was not quite as bad as this but that is the essence of it.

* * *

THE SEX OF SILKWORMS

A RUSSIAN professor has succeeded in controlling the sex of the offspring of silkworms. He can produce all females for the purpose of reproduction, and only males for silk production, at which the male is best. In order to get female offspring, the professor takes the unfertilized eggs from the butterfly and puts them in water at 114 degrees Fahrenheit for 18 minutes. From there the eggs are immediately immersed in cold water. After this treatment the eggs are kept in the usual manner to develop larvae. The butterflies that come from this batch will all be females and have their mother's characteristics. They too can produce eggs that, if treated in the same manner, will result in another generation of females.

In order to get all male offspring, it is necessary to subject the female to a powerful X-ray treatment before fertilization. In this way the nuclei of the eggs lose their vitality, and after they are fertilized they all develop into males who look just like their father because the female nucleus has been destroyed.

* * *

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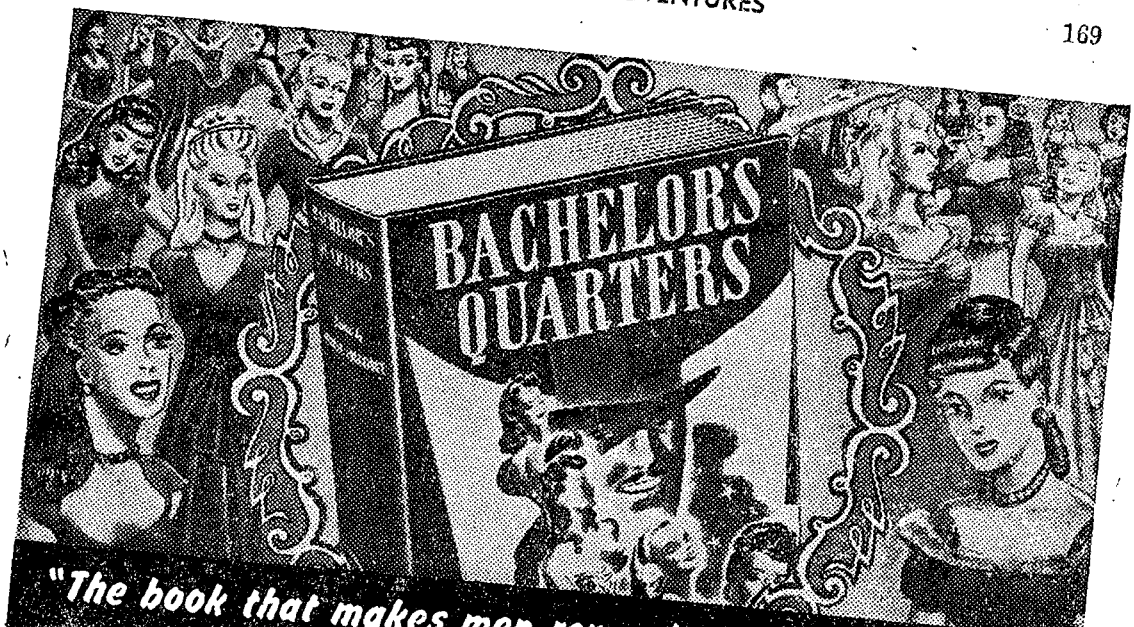

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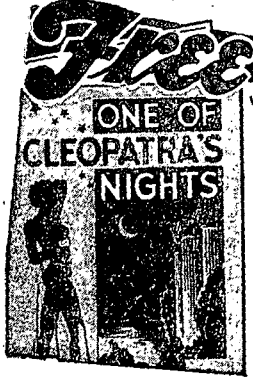

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fantastic Facts

By LEE OWENS

DETECTING A WITCH

HUNDREDS of people were suspected of being witches during the dark ages. Most of them were women, and the punishment was usually burning at the stake. Many women were found guilty of turning themselves into wolves, and killing whole flocks of sheep. There is a court record of a man who saw a wolf while he was working in the fields. He chased it and was able to cut off its front paw before it got away. He put the paw in his pocket, and in the morning he was surprised to find that it had turned into the bloody hand of his wife.

One of the methods of detecting a witch was to find its insensible spot. They believed that there was one spot on the body of any person possessed by the devil, that was entirely insensitive to any amount of pain. If a needle was stuck into that spot, or if it were burned, the person would not cry out in pain because they could not feel it. There was even a group of "professional" people who were skilled in the art of pricking people, mostly women, suspected of being witches. This art flourished in Scotland, and the people who followed it were called "prickers."

Even the most skilled "prickers" had trouble forcing confessions out of stubborn suspects. There is on record the case of Dr. Fian who was thought to be guilty of raising the wind by employing black magic. He was tortured till he confessed, but just before he was to die for his "crime," he

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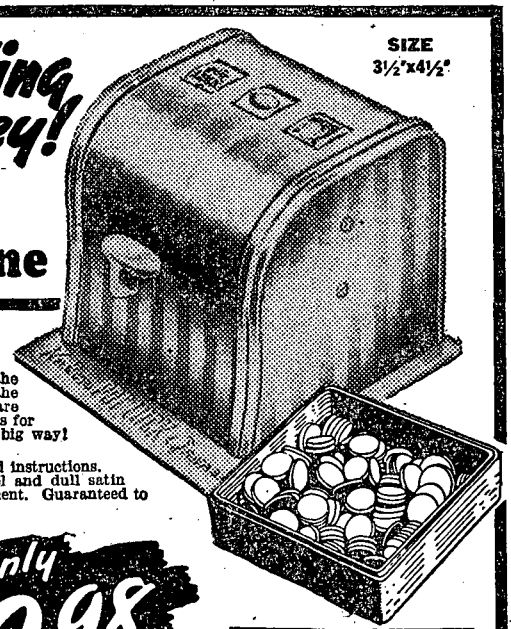

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retracted his statement and had to be tortured all over again. The bones in his legs were broken to bits, but his loyalty to the devil was so strong within him, that he still refused to acknowledge his guilt. The record of his case states: "the nailes on all his fingers were riven and pulled out with an instrument called in Scottish a turkas, which in English we call a payre of pincers, and under every naile there was thrust in two needles over even up to their heads. . . ." The report goes on to say that even after all this torture, he remained firm in his denial, and it was necessary to burn him at the stake without the satisfaction of a confession.

* * *

THE LISTENING SNAKE

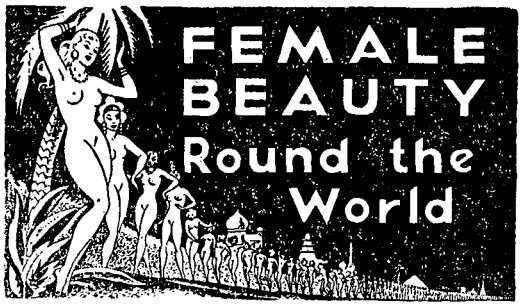
NEXT time a snake sticks his tongue out at you, don't think he is just being impolite or rude. He is just listening for you. A snake has no ears, but his tongue is covered with very sensitive nerve endings which catch all the vibrations in the air, including the sound waves. Most snakes smell with their tongues, so that is all the more reason for even a well-reared snake to stick his tongue out.

* * *

THE THUGS

THERE was once a Hindu religious sect known as thuggee. The fact that we got our English word "thug" from that cult, should give you some idea of the type of people believing in this amazing religion. The Thugs worshipped the goddess Kali, wife of the god Siva. Though the British East India Company and the English government have stamped out thuggee, Kali is still worshipped in India. She is a horrible sight holding the severed head of a man in one of her four hands. Being a bloodthirsty divinity, it is her wish that all mankind be stamped out. At one time, so the story goes, it was her practice to slaughter, or have her priests kill as many men as possible. She started this practice soon after the world was created, but Vishnu didn't think much of all this killing, so he decreed that from every drop of blood that fell to the ground another human being would miraculously spring. This sort of spoiled Kali's plans, for the more she killed, the larger the population became. So she taught her priests the art of strangulation so that men could be killed without spilling any of their blood. Kali disposed of the bodies of her victims herself, as long as her followers looked away from her. It was considered dangerous to look at the face of a diety.

For some time her strangulation plan worked out all right. The victims were strangled and robbed. The population diminished and Kali's purse grew larger. After each murder, the corpse was brought to her and the faithful turned away while she disposed of it. One curious Thug turned back too soon, and to his surprise, saw Kali in



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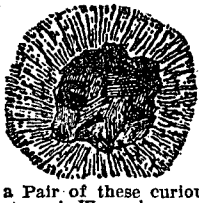

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the process of eating the sacrifice. After that, the goddess never showed herself to mortal man, and as a punishment, decreed that the Thugs should have to bury all the corpses themselves. Pickaxes were used to dig their graves, and so the pickax became the symbol of Kali.

When the British tried to catch a Thug, they found that it was no easy matter. They wanted to live in order to continue their murderous careers, but once they were caught, they were more than eager to be killed. In fact they were filled with joy because they believed they were headed straight for paradise, as a reward for dying as a martyr in Kali's service. A Thug would grab the noose and put his neck in it, and leap high in the air, shouting, "Victory to Kali."

* * *

THE MAGIC OF FLOWERS

FLOWERS have always been used at weddings and at funerals. They are lovely and fragrant and will brighten a room and cheer the sick, and comfort a mourner. There is a superstition that whoever catches the bridal bouquet will be the next to marry. Perhaps this notion came from the idea among primitive people that flowers are symbolic of female sex energy. Especially the lotus was considered a symbol of the mother, the female creator. The lotus and lily were sacred to Venus and were used in religious rituals. In the circular stamens in a lotus you can see the sign of the two crossed triangles. This is a mystic symbol still used by theosophists. It is a holy emblem of the Jewish religion and is called the "Shield of David."

Years ago people thought that all illnesses could be traced to two causes: either the person was possessed by an evil spirit, or he was the victim of an enchantment. In both cases his trouble was due to the malign activities of the powers of destruction. The prescription for the cure consisted of a number of devices that were designed to use the mysterious power of generation either to drive the spirit away or to serve as an antidote to the spiritual poison of witchcraft.

Flowers were considered curative agents because they embodied the generative power of sex. This is also the reason why the bridal bouquet possesses so mysterious a virtue. The lucky girl who catches the bouquet receives this powerful symbol which holds the mystery of life.

As it was the custom to use flowers at the bedside of the sick, it was also necessary to use them in the presence of death. They believed in the hereafter and the survivors thought it necessary to fortify the deceased with the weapons of life, namely the lotus and lily. Flowers were also used to protect the living while they are in the presence of death. Flowers are protectors of humanity. They save maidens from spinsterhood, brides from unfertility, the sick from harm from their tormentors, and the living from the depredations of ghosts.

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The Hindus picture Brahma seated on a lotus, and he is called Kamal-a-yoni, which means "the great god who is at the same time both male and female." There is in the Chinese pantheon a goddess named Puzza which corresponds to the Hindu title Buddha. So the story goes, there were three nymphs who came down from heaven to bathe. While they were in the water, a lotus flower appeared on the clothing of one of them. The myth-makers thought it dangerous to eat a lotus, for it can work an enchantment, but it looked so tempting that the nymph could not resist. By eating the magic flower, she became a mother. As soon as her son was born she went back to her home in heaven. Her child grew up to be a great man, a sage, a law-maker and a warrior. His mother became an object of respect and was named Puzza.

* * *

THE JEALOUS DEMON

IN THE ancient Hebrew Book of Tobit there is an old legend about a demon-lover superstition:

Tobias and the Angel Raphael were camping one night on the banks of the Tigris River. An enormous fish jumped out of the water and tried to devour the young man. It frightened him, but the angel told him to take the fish for future use. The angel told Tobias that if a jealous demon tormented a bride and bridegroom, all they had to do would be to burn the heart and liver of that fish in their chamber and the demon spirit would flee. So Tobias kept the organs that held such power and in due time had occasion to test their efficiency. In the town to which they were traveling lived a beautiful girl named Sara. As was the belief in those times that marriages were arranged in heaven, it had long been the gossip of the angels that Tobias and Sara were meant for each other. But there was a very serious obstacle in the way of their marriage. A demon was also in love with Sara. She refused to have anything to do with him, and he was determined that although he couldn't have her, he would never allow a human being to take the fair maiden as his wife. She had fallen in love and married seven times, and seven times her husbands had been killed on the bridal night. Brave Tobias was the eighth bridegroom to try a union with the beautiful Sara. When the bridal couple returned to their chamber after the ceremony, Tobias prayed and burned the heart and liver of the fish, and the demon fled into Egypt where the angel Raphael found him and bound him securely.

* * *

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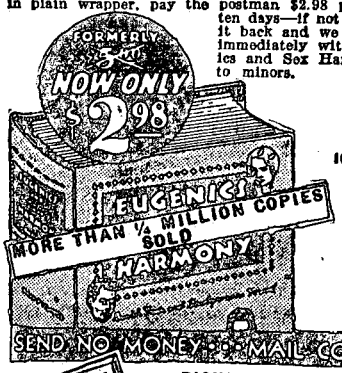

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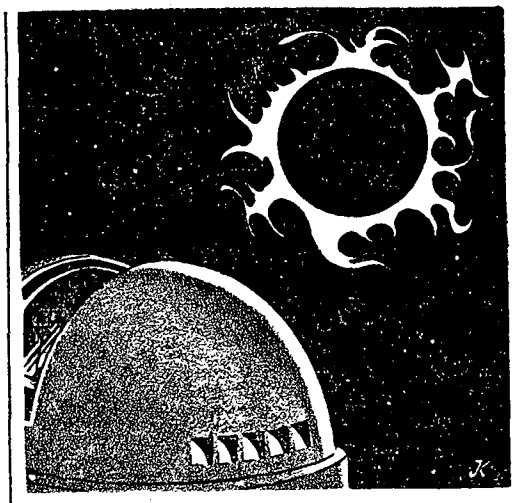

PHOTOGRAPHING THE SUN

★ By A. MORRIS ★

NO ONE as yet has had a clear picture of the sun. If we could see the sun from outside the earth's atmosphere, it would be entirely different from the yellow disk that we are familiar with. The sky would be dark and all the stars would be visible. The disk of the sun would be bluish white, and around the edge would be a flickering scarlet fringe. Most spectacular of all would be the snow-white corona with streamers extending out into space for millions of miles.

The atmosphere surrounding the earth prevents about thirty percent of the sunlight from reaching the earth. This blocked-out light is the part that astronomers are most eager to study—the light of the ultraviolet. We are not able to see this light, but it can be photographed with the right instruments and sensitive emulsions. A method of photographing the sun from above the ozone absorbing layer of the earth, which is about thirty-five miles thick, has always presented a problem. Now since our recent developments in rocketry, the situation looks better. The German V-2 rocket has gone up 105 miles, and that record will soon be broken.

The War Department has a design of a rocket-mounted stratosphere spectograph for the purpose of photographing the sun's color bands. That brought up the problem of how to keep the films from being destroyed by the terrific impact of the rocket crashing down to earth. The use of a small automatic parachute was suggested. Now experts have made an instrument which they expect to be successful. It is a steel casette, with a motor-driven solid-steel rotor, carrying highly sensitive film strips on the flat sides. This rotor is encased in a 14-inch heavy steel tube that leaves only enough space between the casing and the rotor for the film and light-sealing appliances. It can take a picture every twenty seconds and will probably reveal to us a new sun in the sky.

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GODS OF REVENGE

☆ By L. A. BURT ☆

ETHNOLOGISTS like to point out rather humorously—sort of tongue in the cheek fashion—that among all primitive religions, there is found a god who is in charge of avenging any defiling of the sacred shrines. It is true that most religions of that sort have this safeguard, but it is not necessarily humorous. After all tribes have set up their totems and made their medicine, almost invariably the first thing that they do is to assign a curse to anyone who invades their sanctuaries in a mocking manner. It is our practice to laugh and scoff at these curses although the laughter and the scoffing is somewhat subdued when we recall what happened to those who opened the tombs of the Egyptian kings.

Regardless of the skepticism of the scientists, some strange facts have emerged from the host of material on strange religions. India is particularly rich in lore of this sort. On the Afghanistan border of India is a little-known tribe of fierce warriors who have never been tamed by the British—they are called the Sakkas. These people are nominally Moslems but in their isolation from the rest of their religious sect, their practices have changed somewhat. They no longer observe the rigid law against alcohol as do conventional Mohammedans, among other disagreements that exist between their religion and that of the Prophet. In fact, they are particularly addicted to wild orgies in which a home brewed concoction plays an important part. Sir Langley Sever, the British ethnologist who first reported them, made particular note of that fact. He said that on certain feastdays and holidays they became almost paralyzed with drink in the course of their weird rites.

Their temple is a cave cut into solid rock. It is very simple and in keeping with traditional Mohammedan practices, shoes are removed before entering. This rule is strictly enforced. In fact, it is believed to be a sin and violation, a profanation of the worst kind than which nothing could be worse, to enter their house of the god's

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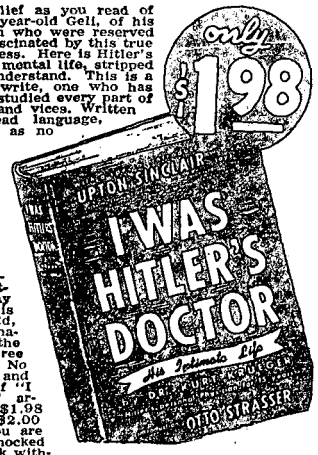

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without removing one's shoes. They have ordained that if anyone is caught so doing, his ears, nose, hands and feet are to be cut off. Sever says that he never observed anyone alive in that state, so it practically amounted to a sentence of death. The primary curse, even worse than the physical punishment is that the guilty will not be permitted to enter Allah's Paradise no matter how he might atone. This is an effective deterrent to any native, to any believer.

Sir Langley's aide, deliberately or carelessly violated the law without being caught. Of course, this was never breathed to the tribesmen or an incident might have arisen which could not have been anything than bad.

This all happened in 1904. A subsequent check into the records of what happened to the aide, discloses that apparently after leaving India with Sir Langley, he led a perfectly normal life. However, there is one inexplicable fact that leads one to believe that laughter had best be reserved for something else than religious taboos. Sir Langley's assistant died of *cancer* of a most malignant and painful form. It took more than three years for the man to die, and all the while he was in tremendous pain, eased only when under opiates. Furthermore, he attributed his affliction to something he had done in his youth—specifically the violation of the temple in remote India. The doctors laughed at the weird idea of course.

This is but one example among a hundred thousand where similar odd coincidences have occurred. A man profanes some primitive religious law or temple and then mysteriously suffers. Authorities attribute his illness to everything but the curse because "everyone knows that curses can't exist—they're just superstitions." It's funny how many coincidences there are apparently. This explanation is often not enough for a man with an inquiring type of mind.

* * *

SUN SACRIFICE

★ **By JUNE LURIE** ★

MANY of the sacred stones in the world are in the shape of pyramids, as this was the favorite shape among those who worshipped the sun. The enormous pyramids of Egypt show to what great lengths superstitious people will go to make symbols of life to guard the gateway of eternity. The old temples of the Aztecs in old Mexico had altars made in this shape. It was the duty of the priests to make human sacrifices to the sun on these altars. The unfortunate person was bent backwards over the altar, and the priest cut out the heart and offered it to the god. At the time Cortez overthrew the empire of Montezuma, many of his men were captured and in this manner made the supreme sacrifice to the sun.

* * *

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DANCE OF THE GODS

By SANDY MILLER

THERE once lived a very good king of Italy named Saturn who taught his people the best methods of agriculture, made the most sensible laws, and in general, created the best civilization the peninsula had ever had. The crops grew in such abundance that he became their god of husbandry. The land was common property so that there was no quarrel for it. War and slavery were unknown to Italy and they were living in a golden age. After the king died, the time of plenty came to an end, but the people did not forget their monarch who was given to them to give them so many blessings. Shrines were built in his honor and December was the month when the people held their celebration of his holy festival, called the Saturnalia.

You might call it the "Dance of the Gods," for the festivities were in honor of the one-time benevolent king of Italy which they referred to as their god of husbandry. During the whole month of December the slaves took the places of their masters and the masters became slaves. They held an election of a temporary monarch whose every wish was granted, regardless of how insulting it was to the purity of others. The feasts always ended in tragedy, for at the end of the gay celebrations the mock monarch had to step up to the altar and slit his own throat. The unrestrained happiness that prevailed, the permission for most any audacities against fellow citizens, the feasting, drinking, and dancing were all for the purpose of representing the wonderful, happy abundance that prevailed while Saturn was among them.

In Europe today, it is the custom to hold carnivals for many occasions. The original purposes for some of these festivals have been lost to most people in antiquity, and we might think of them as merrymaking born from the brains of clowns or such entertainers. These old folk-ceremonies, however senseless they may appear to us now, were once sacred rites. The giant marionettes that are paraded throughout Europe, were made originally to represent demons who were the rightful owners of all the soil which human beings dared to cultivate. It was necessary to pacify these demons so that people would be allowed to remain with their families as tenants on the land. An impressive parade was one way to gain the goodwill of the demon owners. Disguises were worn. Some participants wore masks and clothes to impersonate a ghost so as to please a certain group of spirits who were originally ghosts. From these old customs, our masquerading has developed.

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